

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

HOSTAGES TO FORTUNE



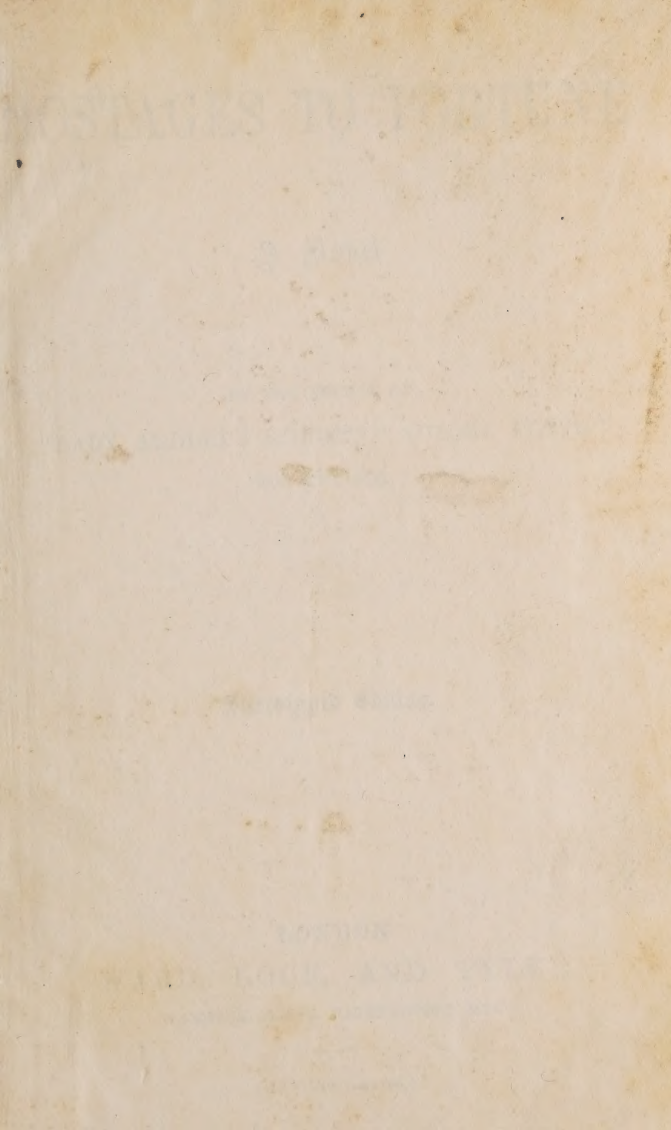
LONDON, WARD, LOCK, & TYLER,


Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1834-1915), a popular English novelist, was born in London. She is now Mrs Maxwell, her husband being a publisher, but she still writes under her maiden name, in which she first became known. "Hostages to Fortune" was issued in 1845. It is a tale of modern English life.

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HOSTAGES TO FORTUNE

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "AURORA FLOYD"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

Stereotyped Edition.

LONDON

WARD, LOCK, AND TYLER

WARWICK HOUSE, PATERNOSTER ROW

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Cates can do in this way falls short of his patrons' demands. They storm his passage, they swarm upon his stairs, and throng his rooms, even trying to invade the sanctity of his bedchamber, and wax loud and savage in their demands for accommodation and refreshment, until Mr. Cates—although feeling that he is making money as fast as he can drop it into his till—wishes that his customers were less numerous or less importunate; or, in his own words, wishes that he “had known beforehand that there would be so many;” though what he would have done had he been so informed, seeing that his house has no power of expansion, and that he has no yard or garden available for the erection of a tent, must ever remain a mystery. Whatever power of expansion his business premises possess has been exercised to the uttermost; for he has absorbed as much of the roadway as he can venture to encumber without detriment to the public. The space before his busy little shop is spread with trays of tarts and buns, hot and hot from the oven, promptly renewed as the hungry visitors consume them.

And wherefore this inroad of the surrounding neighbourhood into quiet little Llandrysak, famous only for its saline and sulphur springs, and in its normal condition the tranquil resort of health-seekers and water-drinkers? Question easily answered. For the last fortnight placards have adorned the public places of Llandrysak—the gates of the market hall, the portal of the post office, and the railway station—setting forth that on this third of August an Eisteddfod would be holden at Llandrysak, and numerous prizes—ranging from ten pounds to five shillings—would be awarded to successful competitors in the art of music and dramatic recitation. A monster tent has been brought from a distant city—Llandrysak is a good forty miles from any large town—and erected behind the pretty little modern Gothic church on the common yonder; and after braving the breeze for a day or two has ignominiously collapsed on Sunday afternoon, to be re-erected with increased stability on Monday. To-day is Tuesday, and the tent still stands bravely. The warm summer sky and soft west wind promise a glorious noontide, and at half-past nine o'clock the inhabitants of surrounding villages are pouring into Llandrysak as fast as the single line of rail can bring them.

Perhaps of all the quiet out-of-the-way places in this sea-bound isle, there is none more tranquil, more remote from the busy world, than Llandrysak. It is certainly not a town, it is hardly to be called a village. Two large and prosperous hotels, and three or four smaller hostelryes—which are rather public boarding-houses than inns—have sprung up around the mineral

springs. Three or four shops and about half a dozen lodging-houses have been built on the edge of an undulating common; and the new church, erected by public subscription, looks down upon the little settlement from its elevation on the aforesaid common.

Llandrysak is situated on a plateau seven hundred feet above the sea-level, and all around it rise the green Cambrian hills, not mighty peaks, like Snowdon or Penmaenmawr, but lovable hills, grassy and ferny—hills that tempt the pedestrian, and seem to cry aloud even to the idlest loungeur: "Come, climb our gentle breasts, and breathe the purer ether that circles round our heads."

Quiet and remote though Llandrysak is, it is eminently popular in its way. The hotels and lodging-houses are full to plethora in the season, and guests are billeted at outlying farmhouses to an alarming extent, considering the number of the lodgers in relation to the space available for their accommodation. In sheltered nooks upon the hill-side, in rustic lanes, you come upon lowly homesteads, which to the stranger's eye appear in no wise too spacious for a farmer's household, and which yet afford board and lodgment to fifteen or twenty water-drinkers in time of need.

Of the two hotels, the Cambria is select and aristocratic, judiciously dividing its guests into two sections, known as Lords and Commons; and the Spring House popular and easy-going. Wondrous stories are told of the chaff and practical joking which obtain at the latter hostelry, and the matrimonial engagements apt to result from a week's residence therein. Pianos are heard long after midnight; amateur concerts and Christy minstrelsy diversify the monotony of social intercourse. Picnics and excursions of all kinds are of daily occurrence; and the click of croquet-balls without and billiard-balls within may be heard from morn till midnight. The more quiet Cambria has its croquet-lawn also, sheltered by surrounding groves of spice-breathing pines, and its spacious billiard-room over the stony chamber, where the unsavoury waters are dealt out by complacent maidens across a pewter-covered bar, suggestive of Spiers and Pond—awful chamber, pervaded ever by the odour of innumerable rotten eggs, which odour is the delightful characteristic of a sulphur-spring in perfection.

This pump-room stands flush with the more aristocratic wing of the Cambria, and its doors and windows open upon the croquet-lawn and piny groves, and a broad space of gravel before the house. An avenue leads from the hotel down to a little bit of road that crosses the common and joins the high-road—for the Cambria stands in a genteel seclusion, about half a mile from

the settlement that has grown up in the neighbourhood of the railway station.

From the pump-room, on this sunny August morning, emerges a gentleman, who wipes his lips with a cambric handkerchief, and wears a disgusted expression of countenance.

"Upon my word, Dewrance, I can't stand much more of it," he exclaims. "Faugh! assafoetida would be ambrosial in comparison."

Mr. Dewrance, in clerical costume—faultless black and Roman collar—is lounging on a bench outside, smoking an after-breakfast cigar, with contentment depicted upon his visage. He is a wandering light in the ecclesiastic system, and has come to do duty at the unendowed church on the common for the season. He is not at Llandrysak for the waters.

"What does it matter how nasty the stuff is if you think it's doing you good?" he asks languidly.

The morning is too warm for much exertion. Even the clerical mind needs repose after the labour of performing matins for the edification of about a dozen females in an advanced stage of spinsterhood.

"Ah, it's all very well for you to talk like that," remonstrates the other. "In the first place you don't drink that nauseous stuff; and in the second, it would jump with your notions of self-mortification—fasting, abstinence, and all that kind of thing—to imbibe obnoxious waters. The sort of thing St. Francis d'Assisi would have liked, you know."

"Are you going to the Eisteddfod?" asks Mr. Dewrance, calmly ignoring these remarks.

"Are you?"

"That depends. Slingford Edwards is to be there in full force," with a wry face; "and I don't much care about the business. But I promised some ladies—"

"Of course; I never knew such a man! Your whole life is frittered away in such small engagements; not an hour that is not pledged to a petticoat. Dewrance, in spite of your varied experience of life, your travels, your knowledge of the world, you are still what you were born to be."

"What is that?" inquires Mr. Dewrance, with the faintest show of curiosity.

"A tame cat."

"Why not?" asks the Curate placidly. "Tame-catism isn't half a bad thing in its way. I like women and women like me. I can make friends of them. I don't flirt, and I never commit myself; and then I look to women to help me in the serious business of my life. A priest can achieve great victories with

an army of women at his command. How are our churches beautified, our sick tended, our poor fed, our children taught and cared for and civilised? Do you think the masculine element goes for much in these things? No, Westray; women are the Church's strong rock. As they were the last at the foot of the cross, so they have become the first at the altar."

"Upon my soul," ejaculates Westray, pulling his dark-brown moustache, "I begin to think that women exercise a great deal more influence than we give them credit for; more than half the world is under petticoat government."

"Why don't you join the majority?" asks Dewrance, with a keen look at his friend.

They have known each other less than a fortnight, yet are on those friendly and familiar terms which men slip into so easily. Herman Westray is a man who has made himself a name in the world of letters. He began his career as a journalist in the year he left Oxford, and has only lately shaken himself free from the trammels of the daily press. He has won reputation as poet, dramatist, critic, novelist, and is a power in literary circles. Stimulated by success, and proud of his budding laurels, he has worked his brain to the verge of exhaustion, and has come to Llandrysak Wells at the advice of a wise old doctor, who attended him nine-and-twenty years ago for chicken-pox and croup.

"Why don't you look out for some nice girl who would reconcile you to the idea of matrimony?" pursues Dewrance. "You're just the kind of man who is bound to go to eternal smash if he doesn't marry."

If Mr. Dewrance's vocabulary is more modern than ecclesiastical, it must be urged in his excuse that he has not been long in holy orders, and that his previous experiences have been of the world worldly.

"I never found a nice girl yet," replies Westray. "I have met handsome girls, clever girls, fascinating girls, but never the woman to whom I could say, 'Take my life into your keeping, and be my better angel. Come between me and my evil thoughts; lead me into the path of peace.'"

"Girls nowadays are awfully fast, I admit," says Dewrance, gravely, "unless they are Anglican. Try an Anglican girl."

"No, thanks. A young woman who would get up at five o'clock in the morning to embroider an antependium, and neglect the housekeeping. I shouldn't like a free-thinking girl, you understand, but I should prefer her religion to take its colour from such teachers as Richter and Carlyle."

Dewrance shrugs his shoulders with a deprecating air, and rises from his recumbent position.

"I think we'd better go and have a look at the Eisteddfod," he says, "in spite of Slingford Edwards."

Slingford Edwards is the Nonconformist light of Llandrysak—Wesleyan or Baptist, no one seemed very clear which; but eminently popular among the natives. He holds forth thrice every Sunday from his rostrum in the red-brick chapel, and appears on weekdays with his manly form equipped in a costume at once agricultural and sportsmanlike, his well-shaped legs, of which he is justly proud, encased in worsted hose, his feet in smart buckled shoes.

This gentleman's popularity at Llandrysak gives him importance at the national festival. He is deputy-chairman, and does most of the hard work, Mr. Morton Jones, the squire, being only required to make a condescending speech, and sit in his armchair, smiling blandly across a little table, throughout the proceedings.

"Let us go and see how Slingford Edwards does it," says Mr. Dewrance, throwing away the stump of his cigar.

They stroll down the avenue and across the common, where even on this warm August day the west wind blows pure and fresh. Green hills ring them round like a girdle, and beyond the green rise loftier peaks, russet-brown or deep purple-tinged gray, melting into the blue cloudless sky.

"I believe your sulphur and saline springs are a gigantic hum-bug," cries Herman Westray, looking round him with the artist's love of the beautiful. "But those hills and this pure air might reanimate exhausted mankind on the brink of the grave. I'm very glad my good old doctor sent me here."

"You look twice as good a man as you did when you came," answers Dewrance. "I never saw such an exhausted specimen of humanity. You looked like a consumptive vampire."

"I had been working six hours a day, or six hours a night, at literature for the last three years. That sort of thing does tell upon a man, especially when he tries to combine social enjoyment with intellectual labour—dines out three or four times a week, wastes his afternoons at garden parties, goes to the opera whenever the heavy swells sing, attends all first performances at the theatres, and so on; thus reducing his working time to the small hours between midnight and morning."

"Dreadful!" cries Dewrance. "I wonder you're alive."

"O, that's habit. If I were to think of the unwholesomeness of my life, I dare say I should die. The quiet of the grave would seem preferable to such high pressure. But I take things easily."

"You look like it," says Dewrance, with a side-glance at his friend's hollow cheeks and darkly-circled eyes.

"Llandrysak has done me no end of good. I had acquired an uncomfortable habit of falling asleep over my desk, which hinted at apoplexy, and now I am as fresh as paint. I have written two acts of a comedy since Saturday."

"I thought you were here for rest."

"O, comedy dialogue hardly counts as work. Besides, I am pledged to give Mrs. Brandreth something sparkling for the opening of the autumn season at the Frivolity."

"The Frivolity? That's one of the new theatres, isn't it?"

"All that there is of the most new: a house like a bonbonnière by Siraudin; all quilted canary satin and gold, with a background of burgundy-coloured velvet; medallion portraits of Shakespeare's heroines on the panels—though what Shakespeare has to do with the Frivolity is more than any fellow can understand. In fact, it's a charming little box. The actors are most of them ex-cavalry subalterns; the actresses—well, there isn't a plain woman among them."

"Mrs. Brandreth herself is a handsome woman, I've heard," says the Curate.

"It would be a bald description of Myra Brandreth to call her handsome," answers Herman. "She is simply one of the most fascinating women who ever turned the brains of men. As for beauty, perhaps there are some handsomer, in her own theatre even; but there is a kind of loveliness about Mrs. Brandreth which I never saw in any one else. It isn't a question of eyes, or nose, or complexion, or figure. She breathes an atmosphere of beauty."

"Poetical," says the Curate; "one would think you were among the men whose brains she has turned."

"Not I. My part in life is rather that of observer of other men's follies than partaker in their delusions. I contrive to dispose of my surplus idiocy in magazine articles."

"Isn't your Mrs. Brandreth a woman with a history?" asks Dewrance. "I seem to remember having heard—"

"'There is a history in all men's lives.' Yes, they tell divers romantic legends of Mrs. Brandreth."

"Antecedents rather discreditable than otherwise," hazards the Curate, who from the spiritual altitude he inhabits bends his ear occasionally to murmurs from the mundane level beneath.

"Mrs. Brandreth is an English officer's daughter, and an English officer's widow. I know nothing further to her disadvantage."

"But come, now, don't people say that Lord Earlswood built this theatre on purpose for her?"

"Theatres are generally built by some one, and for some one," answers the imperturbable Herman.

"I haven't been inside a theatre since I took orders," says Mr. Dewrance. "The opera, of course, is different. I take a seat in a friend's box now and then."

They are close to the tent by this time, and the twanging of a harp within announces that the competition is in progress. They pay for their tickets at a little wooden watch-box outside the tent, and then, instead of entering with the commonalty, go round to the back, and make their way straight to the platform, Mr. Dewrance being a privileged person, for whom a place is reserved among the magnates of the land.

These magnates consist of a few country gentlemen, with their wives and daughters, who occupy a double row of benches on the platform, and thence survey the crowded audience below. Mr. Morton Jones, the chairman; Mr. Slingford Edwards; Mr. Evan Jones, the musical adjudicator; Mr. Davis, the treasurer; Mr. Bufton, the secretary; and two or three other gentlemen officially concerned in the day's proceedings, are clustered about a table in the centre of this platform.

The body of the tent is as full as it can be, and the audience, perspiring but happy, are listening with rapt attention to an ancient Welsh song which a young man of the carpenter profession is singing to an accompaniment on the harp. It is really a spirit-stirring strain, with a fine bold swing in the melody, and better worth hearing than that slaughter of Handel and Haydn which the audience will have to assist at before that entertainment is over.

Competitors in the ancient Welsh minstrelsy being nowhere, the melodious young carpenter has a walk over the course, and receives the prize—half-a-sovereign in a little silken bag, with long ribbon strings, which are hung around his neck by the fair hands of a damsel, who mounts the platform for that purpose amidst the applause of the crowd.

The next entry is the great event of the morning. Competing choirs are to sing Haydn's grand chorus "The Heavens are telling" for a prize of ten guineas, and an ebony-and-silver baton for the conductor. Profound excitement prevails as the names of the competitors are announced. Only two choirs have been found bold enough to essay the contest, and, after a brief delay, the first of these, consisting of about five-and-twenty young men and women, mount the platform, the conductor stands upon a chair, to be better seen by his band, and all is ready for the start.

There is to be no accompaniment, no symphony to induct the

singers in the right path. But from an unseen corner of the tent there issues the lugubrious sound of a tuning-fork. The singers make a dash at the opening note, start off at a hand-gallop, and hold bravely on till they finish breathlessly amidst friendly plaudits.

Choir number two succeeds, and begins with a false start. The pitch has to be given a second, nay a third, time by that lugubrious tuning-fork in the corner—a fact to the last degree ignominious. But once off, choir number two has the best of it; the alto parts ring out more clearly, the time and ensemble are better, and there remains little doubt in the minds of the listeners as to the destination of the ten-pound prize and the ebony baton worth one guinea.

Mr. Evan Jones, the adjudicator (no relation to Mr. Morton Jones, the squire), advances to the front. He is a small active-looking man, with a keen dark face, and a brow prophetic of future distinction. He carries a sheet of music-paper, on which, with ruthless precision, he has recorded the errors of the rival choirs. He expresses himself tersely, and with a certain good-natured irony, not unpleasing to the audience, however galling it may be to the performers, whose work he criticises.

"The first choir," he begins blandly, "sang by no means badly, and in fact the performance was very creditable indeed." (The first choir takes courage, and sees its way to the prize.) "But they were in too great a hurry to distinguish themselves—the opening movement was taken at a gallop. Now there's no glory to God in such a stampede as that." (Laughter.) The first choir looks crest-fallen. "They sang, on the whole, tolerably correctly. There was a G natural that ought to have been G flat; but this we may attribute to nervousness, as well as the fact that they took the largo movement presto. The altos were painfully weak; the basses were a trifle flat. But, on the whole, as I remarked before, we may consider it a creditable performance, and that it does honour alike to their heads and hearts. Now, with regard to choir number two, I am bound to remark that they made a very bad start—took the note wrong twice over; a very unmusician-like proceeding. If the composer had meant the chorus to begin with that kind of floundering about, he would have so written it. But there can be no doubt that the second choir redeemed their characters after this bad beginning by very satisfactory work. Their time was better than number one; their forte passages were firmer; their performance had more light and shade;" and so on, and so on, through a careful criticism of the performance. "I, therefore, feel it incumbent upon me to award the ten-pound prize to the Llanvaerlog choir,

and the prize baton, value one guinea, to the conductor of the same."

Unanimous applause follows the decision. Mr. Slingford Edwards takes a yellow-satin bag from a nail on which it has hung in sight of the audience, looks about him doubtfully for a moment, and then confers in a whisper with the chairman. They are consulting as to the fair hand which is to bestow this guerdon—the chivalrous practice of the Eisteddfod requiring that each prize should be given to the happy winner by a lady selected from among the more distinguished of the assemblage.

"Miss Morcombe," suggests Mr. Edwards, in a whisper.

"Yes, decidedly," replies the chairman, "if she's here. Couldn't have any one better."

This ten-pound prize is the grand feature of the entertainment. The ten-shilling and five-shilling guerdons may be given by anybody, but the donor of the chief prize must needs be a person of mark.

Slingford Edwards slips behind one of those benches on the platform, bends over a young lady's shoulder—a young lady who sits in the back row, and who has been hidden from the gaze of the public. He whispers a few words in her ear—there is a stir and a gentle flutter around her—she rises, and the Reverend Slingford leads her blushing to the front of the platform, where the expectant choristers wait, closely huddled together and open-mouthed.

"Ladies and gentlemen," roars Slingford Edwards above the universal hum, "I am proud—we are all proud, and I am sure you will, every man of you—yes, and every woman—for when was woman's heart slow to throb in unison with man's most generous emotions?—participate in that feeling when I tell you that the great prize of the day will be awarded by Miss Morcombe, the lovely daughter of the most popular landowner—always excepting our respected chairman—in these parts. Miss Morcombe of Lothwithian Priory. Now, Mr. Sparks," to the conductor, "down on your knees, and let the memory of this moment never fade from your mind; let it be a stimulus to future exertion, a guiding star to lead you to glory. Why don't you kneel, you blockhead?" sotto voce to the winner of the prize, who looks as if he had only that moment discovered that his arms are appendages of an awkward and embarrassing character, so limp and helpless are his hands, so painfully angular his elbows.

"Three cheers for Miss Morcombe of Lothwithian," cries Mr. Edwards; whereon the audience, who have had to do a good deal of cheering already, respond feebly, with flagging energies.

The prizes are given—first the baton, and then the yellow-satin bag ; and Miss Morcombe curtsies and retires, led by the gallant Slingford. During the last five minutes she has been the focus of every eye, but no eye has gazed more intently than the eye of Herman Westray.

“What a sweet-looking girl!” says Mr. Westray to his companion.

“Yes, she’s nice, isn’t she? I’ll introduce you, if you like. She’s very clever—likes literary people—likes to talk about them, at least ; for I don’t think she knows many. Serious girl—Anglican.”

“Gets up at five o’clock on saint days, I suppose,” says Herman. “Rather a trial, I should think, that kind of girl.”

“I withdraw my offer to introduce you,” says Mr. Dewrance, with a disgusted look.

“O nonsense ! I should like to know her. What would her getting up at five o’clock matter to me? I am but a bird of passage. Yes, she looks clever as well as pretty, and looks good into the bargain. A fine firmly-moulded face, something out of the common in the expression. Put her into a suit of armour, and she would do for Joan of Arc. Please introduce me.”

“I’ll take you over to the Priory to luncheon to-morrow. I have *carte-blanc* to take any one nice.”

“Introduce me to-day. Is that sportsmanlike party with the foxy whiskers her father?”

“Yes, that’s Mr. Morcombe—fine fellow—good old Saxon family—pedigree that goes back to Hengist and Horsa—looks down upon people who date from the Conquest.”

“No end of money, I suppose?”

“Humph !” ejaculates Dewrance doubtfully ; “no end of land, if you like, but money dubious—ready cash at a premium. I believe Miss Morcombe inherits something from her mother, but nothing considerable. People who trace their lineage as far as Hengist and Horsa are seldom heavily ingotted.”

“Introduce me, please.”

“Wait till the Eisteddfod is over. I’ll ask them to luncheon at the Cambria.”

Mr. Westray sighs. He is not intensely interested in the musical contest. A young person of eleven is rattling through one of Brinley Richards’s fantasias upon a national air, with more patriotic fervour than discretion. There is to be a Welsh song in character after the pianoforte-playing ; and a recitation, Hamlet and the Ghost, after that. So that Mr. Westray, studying his programme intently, hardly sees his way to the conclusion of the entertainment.

"Can't we get out, Dewrance?" he asks fretfully; but Mr. Dewrance is whispering to the chairman, and has something to say to most of the ladies on the platform, and is, in short, in his glory as arbiter of feminine opinion in Llandrysak.

Bnt, lo, presently, comes an unlooked-for diversion. The sunshine which illuminated the tent a quarter of an hour ago has vanished, and a cold grayness prevails in its stead. Now comes the patter of raindrops on the canvas, heavier and heavier, and the assembled multitude begin to have an uncomfortable feeling that canvas is porous, and that there are, moreover, various holes in the tent through which the rain is already descending pretty smartly, to the detriment of new bonnets. Umbrellas go up. Mr. Dewrance has three pretty girls clustering under his serviceable Sangster. Murmurs of discontent arise at the back of the tent from eager souls whose vision is impeded by the front ranks of umbrellas. The Reverend Slingford remonstrates with the umbrella-holders; urges that while the contest is going on they should submit to be rained upon rather than interfere with the enjoyment of the majority.

"I should like to know who could enjoy themselves in such weather as this?" grumbles a sturdy farmer in the front row; "there ought to have been a tarpaulin."

"We didn't pay our money to be drenched to the skin," ejaculates another.

"Think of your second crop of grass," urges Slingford Edwards, "and what a blessing this gentle shower is for you."

Meanwhile the rain falls faster; it splashes and patters upon the piano, so that the last young interpreter of Brinley Richards is fain to stop short in the middle of her performance, and the piano is shut, and covered with green baize. The harp is also shrouded; the smart little satin bags are thrust under cover.

The élite upon the platform huddle together anyhow, and little pools of water lie upon the abandoned benches. The Eisteddfod comes to a dead stop, and the only question among the audience is whether it be wiser to stay where they are, or to brave the fury of the tempest in crossing the narrow ridge of common, which lies between them and shelter. Miss Morcombe is standing by her father, sheltered by his umbrella, and enveloped in a dark blue cloak, which drapes the tall full figure from head to foot. In the confusion that prevails Herman has ample leisure to scrutinise the Squire's daughter unobserved.

Yes, she is handsome, certainly; but that which most attracts Herman Westray, to whom a handsome woman is no rare spectacle, is the something loftier and nobler than common beauty which distinguishes that innocent young face. The

modelling of the features is somewhat large ; there is that fulness of outline which one sees in a Greek statue, not one sharp angle in the face, yet the lines supremely regular. The complexion is not fair, but has that fresh bloom which comes of an open-air life ; the eyes are darkest gray, so dark that till they turn and meet his own Herman thinks them black ; the hair darkest brown, and superabundant, for the thick plaits coiled closely at the back of the head are innocent of padding. Franker, fairer countenance never smiled upon mankind. No dangerous Circean fascination here—nothing of the siren or the Lorelei in this young English maiden—no “history” in her glad young life. Herman feels that he is face to face with happy innocent girlhood, and draws a deep breath of gladness, as if he felt himself in a purer atmosphere than the air of his every-day existence.

A thunder-peal bursts and crackles over the tent. The rain comes down faster than ever, more thunder and lightning, then a lull, and the rain grows less.

“It’s holding up,” says Dewrance, who has been to the door to reconnoitre. “I really think we’d better get away while we can. You and your papa must come to the Cambria and have some luncheon, Miss Morcombe. I shall be so pleased if you will, and then you can come back for the afternoon performance.”

“Heavens,” exclaims Westray ; “isn’t it all over ?”

“No, there’s another contest in the afternoon, and a concert in the evening.”

Herman makes a wry face, whereat Miss Morcombe laughs joyously.

“You don’t care for our Eisteddfods,” she says, ignoring the fact that he has not been introduced to her.

“I don’t admit that. The Eisteddfod is charming in its way, but, like all other good things, one may have too much of it. I pity the people who are coming back to this damp tabernacle this afternoon.”

“Thanks for your compassion,” says Miss Morcombe. “I wouldn’t lose ‘Rejoice greatly’ on any account.”

“There’s no rain now, Miss Morcombe. You’d better come,” interjects Dewrance, offering his arm, and they go out—the Curate and his fair young charge in front, Westray and the Squire straggling after. The piano has been opened again, the umbrellas are down, and another juvenile executant is slaughtering Brinley Richards.

“O, I’m afraid I forgot to introduce you to each other,” says Dewrance, looking back. “Mr. Westray, Miss Morcombe. Mr. Westray, Mr. Morcombe,”

The Curate had a somewhat offhand manner with these magnates of the land. He esteems them for their ancient lineage, their broad acres, but in his own mind he occupies a higher intellectual level, from which he looks down upon those rustic Philistines urbanely. He is the salt of the earth, without which their life would be savourless, and is calmly conscious of his claim on their gratitude. What can be more magnanimous, for instance, than his presence in this remote Welsh watering-place? Has he not dissevered himself from all the amenities of progress in order to secure the enlightenment of these barbarians?

"Changeable weather," says the Squire with a friendly air.

"Very. Are you going to have a good harvest?"

"Yes, it'll be a great year for cereals. Turnips are bad, clover poor, and we've had hardly any hay to speak of on account of the dry summer. This is a sheep country; we don't grow much corn."

"So I perceive. Charming country for ferns. Plenty of limestone. Miss Morcombe is great upon ferns, I daresay."

"Yes, I think she knows all about everything in that way. She's great in horticulture. I call her my head gardener. You must come over to the Priory and see her rose-garden, and her green-houses."

Miss Morcombe is questioning her companion meanwhile.

"Did you say Westray?" she asks eagerly.

"Yes, his name is Westray."

"Herman Westray, the novelist, the dramatic author?"

"The same."

"How good-natured he looks!" wonderingly.

"Did you expect a laughing-hyenaish physiognomy?"

"I don't know what I expected. He writes like a man who admires nothing, believes in nothing, despises the world he lives in, and yet he writes so beautifully that one feels as if there were a mine of deep feeling under all that cynicism."

"A mere trick of the trade," sneers Dewrance. "Cynicism has sold wonderfully well ever since Thackeray set the fashion, and these young men out-Herod Thackeray, without a tithe of his genius. They are as melancholy as Solomon in Ecclesiastes, and they inlay their Rochefoucauldism on a groundwork of Byronic passion. They take all the tricks and manners of departed genius and make an olla podrida of their own, and call that literature," with ineffable contempt, "and are dazzled by the glitter of their tawdry mosaic, and think themselves geniuses."

"Mr. Westray doesn't look as if he were conceited," says Miss Morcombe meekly. She has read his books, and heard of his comedies, and it seems to her a privilege to see him in the flesh. Living amongst agricultural surroundings and purely common-

place people, she may be forgiven if she has over-exalted ideas about a popular writer. After all, it is the Philistines who are readiest to worship notoriety, which, in their innocence, they mistake for renown.

They enter the pine-wood avenue that leads to the hotel. The sun has shone out hotly again, and all the piny spikes and feathery fir-branches glitter with raindrops, as with innumerable elfin lamps. This avenue is dusky even on the brightest day, offering welcome shade and coolness after the glare of the common.

Mr. Dewrance leads the way to the coffee-room, sacred to the more select patrons of the Cambria. Hospitable preparation has been made for this festival day; the sideboard is loaded with ham and sirloin, tongue and chicken. The Curate makes straight for a small round table in the bow-window that commands the avenue and a glimpse of sunlit common beyond, just the nicest spot in the room. Miss Morcombe and Herman Westray seat themselves opposite each other, the Squire drops into a chair next his daughter, and Dewrance goes to the sideboard to cater for his guests, and to press one of the busy native waiters into his service.

Herman has plenty of time now to study the fair young face on the other side of the cozy round table. As a weaver of romance, he is naturally a student of humanity, and in any stranger may find a type. He looks at this girl thoughtfully, reverently almost. She seems to him a being of idyllic purity. There is a freshness about her beauty, a youthful candour in its expression, which, to his fancy, is the very spirit of rustic innocence; not the innocence of milkmaid or shepherdess, but of a damsel of lofty race reared in the sweet air of her native hills, simple as Perdita, high-bred as Rosalind.

She is certainly beautiful, more absolutely beautiful than he had believed her at first. The dark rich hair which waves a little at the temples, the pencilled eyebrow, the noble modelling of mouth and chin, might satisfy the most exacting critic. And this is no doll-faced beauty. There is mind in that fair young face.

"I was so pleased to hear from Mr. Dewrance that you are *the* Mr. Westray," she begins somewhat shyly; "the author whose books have given me so much pleasure."

"Have you really read them?" asks Herman, delighted. "I did not know my scribble had penetrated so far."

"Do you suppose we are quite Bœotians? We have our box from Mudie once a month; and I have read, at least I think I have read, all you have ever published."

"My daughter is a tremendous reader, devours a bundle of literature monthly—travels, biographies, Lord knows what. I believe she thinks herself a cut above novels, unless they are something out of the common. I don't know how she finds time to open a book, what with her schools and her house-keeping and her gardening and her church-going."

"There is generally one hour in the day that I can contrive to steal for a quiet read," says Miss Morcombe, "and perhaps I enjoy my books all the better because I am obliged to limit my enjoyment."

"Have you so many duties?" asks Herman, with only a languid curiosity. His interest in the Squire's daughter does not extend beyond her face. He is in no wise concerned to know the manner of life she leads in her barbarous fastness amid the wild fern-clothed hills.

"Many duties!" exclaims Dewrance, coming back laden with a salad-bowl and cruet-stand, and attended by a waiter with roast fowls and tongue and a dainty shoulder of lamb. "I should think she has indeed. There are not many parish priests who work harder than Miss Morcombe. You should see her schools. I don't know any in England so perfect, on a small scale of course, but absolutely perfect."

Herman pushes back the loose brown hair from his forehead and gazes at Miss Morcombe with a puzzled look. He has ever detested everything that verges upon strong-mindedness, independence, self-reliance, in a woman. The women he has admired hitherto belong to the papilionaceous tribe; women who are more concerned in the supply of *stephanotis* at Covent Garden than in the price of bread; women who are ready to die if they miss a favourite opera, and have neuralgia if their dressmaker disappoints them; women who are "a little low" on the slightest provocation, and require to be sustained with pints of Pommeroy or Cliquot between breakfast and kettledrum; women whose high-priestess is fashion, and whose religion is dress; whose gravest reading is a *risqué* social article in the *Saturday Review*, and whose poetry and sentiment are derived from modern French novels.

Such women as these Herman has hitherto found ineffably charming; not good enough for marriage, or the unrestrained confidence of friendship, but delightful for airy social companionship. Women with whom to waste a summer afternoon at Wimbledon or Hurlingham; with whom to discuss the last fashionable scandal in cleverly-chosen half-words; from whose fair hands to receive the refreshing cup of orange-scented pekoe, or the invigorating glass of vermouth. With such as these—the lilies

of life's field—he has gaily ridiculed the women who toil and spin—the women with mind; the serious virgins who rise at cockerow on saints' days, and are never found with lamps untrimmed. He has ridiculed feminine effort of all kinds—philanthropic, artistic, Evangelical, or Anglican; has scouted the idea of feminine duty; and has taken for the motto of his ideal woman the lotos-eater's listless burden, "Let us alone."

And now behold him face to face with a young woman whose duties are manifold, and whose calmly beautiful face impresses him as no other face has done since those days of adolescence when every fair-haired school-girl seemed a Helen.

They talk about literature, Dewrance expounding positive opinions in that sledge-hammer voice of his; Herman less vehement, but more trenchant, his wit having a sharper edge than the Curate's. Miss Morcombe talks unrestrainedly; her favourite poet is Tennyson; her favourite poem, *The Idyls of the King*. For the sensuous in art and poetry she has no sympathy—nay, she shrinks from the very names of those writers who are its chief exponents, and is silent when Herman praises a singer of the De Musset school. She has read no French novels, but she knows Châteaubriand and Lamartine by heart, Herman discovers. Rococo rather, thinks the modern man of letters, with his catholic appreciation of modern turns of thought. This Squire's daughter seems to him tolerably well read in all that is best worth reading; a being of infinite knowledge as compared with his lilies of the field, who take a pretty pride in their ignorance, and make it, as it were, a new accomplishment to know nothing.

Dewrance talks of art while he mixes the salad. He is a man who has travelled much, and learned many things; among others the making of a salad, on which he prides himself.

"What an insipid business luncheon is in a country hotel!" he exclaims. "Now I could take you to a restaurant in the Seven Dials, where I used to go a good deal before I was in orders, and give you half a dozen *hors-d'œuvres* by way of appetisers. Here one must put one's trust in a bowl of lettuces—no tarragon or chervil—not an anchovy for love or money—the nearest lobster to be heard of at Tenby."

Miss Morcombe confesses to an appetite which does not require to be stimulated by anchovies or caviare.

"Papa and I breakfasted at seven," she says, "and I've no doubt we shall do justice to our luncheon."

"Strange!" thinks Herman; "here is a woman not ashamed to admit that she can eat."

His social sirens have, for the most part, languid appetites, but a considerable power of suction. They exhibit a placid uncon-

sciousness when attentive serving-men fill and refill their glasses, and absorb the contents thereof unawares.

The luncheon proceeds gaily. Dewrance is always good company, and the others have plenty to say. The Squire eats and drinks and holds his peace. He is neither literary nor artistic; his tenants have been backward with their rents lately, and he has cares which make him thoughtful. Herman looks at him, and wonders how a man so eminently commonplace can have such a daughter.

Two o'clock strikes, and the room grows clear. The second part of the Eisteddfod begins at half-past two. Miss Morcombe puts on her gloves, an operation which Herman watches attentively, as if it were the most interesting spectacle to see pale-gray kid-gloves drawn upon a pair of dimpled hands, not so white as the hands of those sirens he wots of—somewhat sun-browned, indeed, but the perfection of form.

"I think it is time for us to go, papa. You have to take the chair, you know, this afternoon."

"Yes," sighs the Squire, "it's a pity Jones doesn't do it. He's better at that kind of thing than I am."

"O but, papa, you know what you ought to say; the pleasure you feel in the development of native talent, the softening and elevating influence of music, how it brightens all our homes—the humblest as well as the loftiest; and how glad you are to see so many familiar faces round you, all smiling and happy; and how you hope this first Eisteddfod ever held at Llandrysak will not be the last; and how you will do your utmost to maintain the custom among us; and so on, and so on."

"I shouldn't want any 'so on' or 'so forth,' if I could get through all that," says the Squire. "You women have such glib tongues. I wish you could speak the speech for me, Editha."

"I wish I could, papa. I should like to stand up among the people I've known from childhood, and tell them how I love their customs and themselves. Indeed, I wish I could."

"And indeed, Editha, you would do it well, and they would like to hear you."

They rise to go, Dewrance and Westray both in attendance.

"You won't care to hear any more of the Eisteddfod," says Miss Morcombe, smiling at Herman.

"Yes; I mean to attend afternoon service—I beg your pardon, Dewrance, the afternoon contest."

"But you were tired of the music this morning."

"I shall not be tired this afternoon. If five-and-twenty young Welshwomen come forward one after another to sing 'Angels ever bright and fair'—it's in the programme, I think—

and hold on for hours, I will show no sign of impatience. I will stand 'Pious Orgies' like a lamb. I will submit unconditionally to the Welsh song in character."

"I'm glad you have a corner of your heart to spare for our dear old country," says Editha, with a pleased look.

"I only hope that I may not leave more than a corner of my heart in your principality," he answers, with ever so slight a smile.

They go back to the tent in the sunlight. All the scene is gay and bright; no more umbrellas. Smart bonnets and feathered hats shining out, little the worse for the morning's rain; faces smiling and rubicund, after copious refreshment of a teetotal character at Mr. Cates's.

Squire Morcombe makes his speech, on the lines laid down by his daughter. If trite and somewhat feeble, he at least appears friendly, and the audience cheer lustily. The harp strikes up with a lively Welsh air; then comes one of Handel's choruses by divers working men in their Sunday clothes, who acquit themselves not amiss, for these Welshmen have a natural love of and capacity for music, and sing part-songs with the zest and tunefulness of German students trolling out their Volkslieder.

The afternoon wears on; there is a good deal of repetition, but Herman Westray endures with resignation. He is seated next Miss Morcombe, and is making a study of her character, with a view to putting it to some literary use by and by. He talks to her in the pauses of the entertainment, which are numerous; and although "Angels ever bright and fair" has been sung seven times consecutively, he thinks the contest rather too short than otherwise when all is over, and Mr. Morcombe takes his daughter to the wagonette which is waiting for them outside, in company of various other conveyances.

"I wish you were going to stop for the concert," says Dewrance.

Herman says nothing, but has desires upon the same subject.

"I wish we were, but it is such a long drive to the Priory, and papa likes to dine at home."

"Never got a decent dinner at Llandrysak," answers the Squire decisively. "Bring your friend over to-morrow, Dewrance, and let him see the ruins, and Editha's conservatories."

"I should be too delighted," says Westray, not waiting for the Curate to respond.

"I've been thinking of bringing him," replies Dewrance, "remembering what you were kind enough to say about my friends."

"Of course, of course. Be sure you come early; we lunch at two."

Miss Morcombe is seated in the wagonette by this time ; they all shake hands with effusion.

"Auf Wiedersehen," says Herman, as he releases Editha's hand, with just that shade of tenderness which he is apt to assume in his converse with women. A mere trick of tone and manner, perhaps, but not without effect.

"Editha," he says to himself softly, as he and Dewrance walk up the avenue ; "a fine Saxon name. It suits her admirably."

"Well, what do you think of Miss Morcombe ?" asks the Curate briskly. "A superb girl, isn't she ? A woman worth any man's winning."

"A woman to make a good man a noble wife," answers Westray gravely ; "but a woman whom a worldly man ought to avoid."

"Why ?"

"Because she is not of the world, but above it."

"Can a man have too good a wife ?" asks Dewrance incredulously.

"I can imagine no greater misfortune for a man than to be mated to a woman who is above him."

"His self-respect or vanity would be wounded by finding a superior in his wife ; is that what you mean ?"

"I mean that his whole life would be out of joint. To be reasonably happy, or fairly united, a man and his wife should be on the same level. No good ever came, in legend or fairy tale, of the union of mortal and immortal."

"Ah," sighs the Curate dubiously, "you have such a romantic way of looking at things. I only wish I had a shadow of a chance with Miss Morcombe ;" this with a deeper sigh. "I am not too proud to say that I think myself infinitely below her, yet I am bold enough to believe that I could make her life happy and my life worthy of her."

"That is quite possible. But you are a better man than I. You have definite aims, and high ones. You are in earnest, and have proved your earnestness by the sacrifice of worldly advantage. Now I have no aim beyond winning a certain measure of transitory popularity, and as much money as publishers or managers will give me for my wares. Nothing earnest, nothing exalted there. And how could such a life as mine mate with Miss Morcombe's ? There is not an hour of the day in which our opinions and feelings would not differ."

"Provided that you have not committed murder or forgery, and that your worst sin is want of earnestness, I don't suppose that Miss Morcombe would be afraid to undertake your reformation," says the Curate, with a shade of bitterness. He has seen

that Westray has made more impression upon the lady's mind in a few hours than he has been able to make in two months, despite the fact that Editha's sympathies are all with him and his work.

"Upon my word, Dewrance," says Herman seriously, "if I thought there were the slightest danger of my falling in love with that young lady, I would pack my portmanteau, and go back to London by the mail."

"If you are of that way of thinking, pack your portmanteau," replies Dewrance with energy. "Editha Morcombe is not a woman for whom a man can measure his regard. To know her is to admire her; and who can tell in what moment admiration may ripen into love?"

"I am not afraid," answered Westray lightly. "In the first place, I have long since used up my susceptibility, and in the second, I detest strong-minded women. Now while I admit that your Miss Morcombe is eminently noble, I can see that she is strong-minded."

"She is certainly not weak-minded, and she thinks for herself."

"Precisely. Now a woman who thinks for herself would never do for me. My wife—if ever I marry—must be subordinate as the moon to the sun. I will love her and cherish her and work for her, and her wigwam shall be as fair as my toil can make it; but my squaw must be a fond and gentle creature, whose thoughts and likings will take their colour from mine."

"Heaven forbid that Editha Morcombe should ever be reduced to such a level!" ejaculates Dewrance fervently.

"My dear fellow, there is no such thing possible.

"It were all one,
That I should love a bright particular star,
And think to wed it."

CHAPTER II.

"Hélas je n'oserai vous aimer, même en rêve!
 C'est de si bas vers vous que mon regard se lève !
 C'est de si haut sur moi que s'inclinent vos yeux !"

THE Squire's injunction to be early has not been forgotten. Mr. Dewrance and his friend drive away from the pine-groves of the Cambria on the stroke of noon. The day is warm and bright, the sky almost Italian; the russet hills in the background of the landscape, the verdant undulations of the foreground smile under a vault of cloudless sapphire. It is a day on which the mind goes to sleep, and a sensuous delight in sunshine and beauty is paramount in every breast; a day on which life loses the sharp edges and angles of care and thought, and lapses into the indistinct sweetness of a dream.

Dewrance drives the dog-cart. He is always ready for the active duties of life. Westray sits beside him, for the most part silent, looking dreamily at the landscape, which, after the first three miles, is new to him. They enter a region of wooded banks, where oak and larch and mountain-ash grow tier above tier on rough ledges of earth rising sheer like a wall, and held together by fern and interwoven roots; a region of loftier hills and deeper valleys; a region of infinite beauty.

"Yes, it's a pity," says Herman at last, after a long silence.

"What's a pity?"

"That you and Miss Morcombe can't make a match of it. You would suit each other admirably."

"Perhaps," says Dewrance; "but unfortunately she doesn't see things in that light."

"Time may open her eyes to the fact."

"Do you think if I had any chance of success that I would take *you* there?"

"What, have you so exalted an idea of my fascinations?" asks Westray, with a little laugh.

"I think you are just the kind of man to attract the fancy of a girl brought up like Miss Morcombe."

"Well," sighs the man of letters, "I have told you my ideas about marriage; but even those are purely abstract notions which I doubt if I shall ever reduce to personal experience. I am remarkably well off as a single man; I enjoy ever so many privileges and pleasures which I should lose if I were to marry

I earn more than enough money for my own requirements, and, indeed, have been able to invest a few superfluous thousands. I live just the life that pleases me. Why should I exchange the known for the unknown—placid contentment for uncertain bliss? Why assume responsibilities which may or may not be counterbalanced by the joys they bring with them?"

"You live the life that pleases you, you say," replies Dewrance, contemplating his friend with grave scrutiny. "Is there nothing unworthy in that life—nothing you would shrink from revealing to your mother or your sister?"

"Nothing—now," answers Westray. "I do not say that my life has been altogether blameless, or that there have not been episodes in it which I look back upon with regret."

"And at two-and-thirty you hope to escape all future temptation—all peril of peace or character—without the safeguard of wife and home?"

"Why not? You are content to stand alone."

"I have my duty, which is more than wife or children," replies Dewrance gravely. There is a quiet depth of earnestness in the Curate's character, despite its surface lightness.

"It was the wisest of mankind who said that the man who hath wife and children hath given hostages to Fortune," says Westray. "Now I am not so sure of Fortune that I care to engage myself to her so heavily. Fortune may be friendly enough to a bachelor who asks her for no more than a second-floor in Piccadilly, and the run of two or three clubs; yet may turn her back upon a married man who has to pay house-rent and taxes, servants' wages and milliners' bills, and to take his wife and babies to the seaside, and send his eldest boy to Eton."

Dewrance answers with a sigh.

"I am willing to admit that civilised life is a problem," he says. "The Maories have no such difficulties."

They are descending into a valley, a deep cleft between two hills; a narrow river—sorely shrunk at this dry season—flows over its stony bed at the bottom of the gorge, and in a verdant hollow between the river and the higher ground along which the dog-cart is driving lie the ruins of Lochwithian Priory.

Little of these remain—neither archway nor tower—only the solid foundations of chapel and cloisters, the massive stonework that formed the steps of the high altar, the broken base of a clustered column here and there at an angle.

"The monks of old had a knack of finding the pleasant places of this earth," says Westray. "Valleys flowing with milk and honey, hill-sides famous for unapproachable mutton, woods peopled with game."

"And they occasionally planted themselves on such fertile spots as Mount Athos or St. Bernard," answers Dewrance, whose Anglican mind has a keen sympathy with the Church of the past.

"I daresay the Priory kitchen was built over that trout stream, and that the scullions washed their dishes in the running water," says Westray. "But pray where do our friends reside? Do they encamp among those low walls, or have they a comfortable cavern in the hill-side?"

"The new Priory stands before you," replies Dewrance, pointing to it with his whip.

A wind in the road has brought them face to face with the mansion of the lord of the soil; by no means a modern habitation, but of the Elizabethan era, with steep gables, mullioned windows, an oriel here and there at a corner. The house is built upon the slope of a hill, and stands above the raised road along which Dewrance and Westray are driving. It is large, rambling, irregular, and has evidently been expanded, but not within the last century. Time has mellowed the tints of the masonry, deepened the dark red of the brickwork, embroidered the massive chimney-stacks with mosses and lichens. The garden lies on a southward fronting slope, and one can fancy that the red wall yonder, behind the house, and on a higher level, is rich in ruddy peaches and apricots; an old-fashioned garden overrunning with flowers. Straight gravel-walks intersect square grass-plats. Here stands a stone sundial, there a quaint old fountain. Raleigh might have smoked his peaceful pipe in just such a garden.

"Thank Heaven it is not a perky modern place, all stucco and stuckupishness," cries Herman.

"You dislike modern houses?"

"I would go ever so far out of my way to avoid living in one; and if I could not afford Queen-square, Westminster, would prefer Bloomsbury to Belgravia. Even Abbotsford, despite its cherished associations, jarred upon me a little because I knew its mediævalism was all carton-pierre."

They are at the lodge-gate by this time. Below them, at the bottom of the valley, walled-in on three sides by hills, stands a gray stone church with a tall spire, modern Gothic—small, but perfect; beside it the village school, a pretty Gothic building, larger than the sparse population of the district would seem to warrant. An inn of no great pretensions—the inns in Wales are of small account—and a little cluster of cottages make up all that is visible of the village of Lochwithian. Westray looks about him wonderingly.

"It is like the end of the world," he says.

The gate is opened and they drive up to the Priory. The fine old timber porch offers a cool and shadowy shelter from the blazing day. The door within stands hospitably open, and they can see the hall, with its darkly-bright oak panelling, and fitful gleams of colour, and flash of armour against the deep-hued wood. The light from a painted window plays and flickers upon the carved coat-of-arms over the lofty chimney-board, and leaves the rest of the hall in shadow. A family portrait looks out here and there through the dusk.

"What a delicious place!" exclaims Herman. "Miss Morcombe will inherit this in due time, I suppose?"

"Not unless her two brothers and their young families perish untimely in order to make room for her."

"She has brothers, then?"

"Yes; one, a captain of artillery, in Bengal; the other, incumbent of a small living in Devonshire. Both of them married, and richly provided with olive branches."

"Has she any sisters?"

"One, whom she idolises; older than herself; a confirmed invalid; something amiss with the spine. She rarely leaves her own room, or receives visitors; but she and I are firm friends."

Three or four dogs come out to look at the arrivals, and recognise Dewrance, and are friendly to obtrusiveness: an old Scotch deerhound, a couple of greyhounds—numerous in this part of the country—and a black-and-tan collie; which last the Curate distinguishes with especial kindness.

"Good Lancelot, brave old Lancelot!" he says, as the animal fawns upon him.

"The collie is Miss Morcombe's favourite," remarks Westray sagely.

"How do you guess that?"

"By induction. The favour you showed him enlightened me."

After the dogs appears an elderly serving-man, who rings the stable-bell, and takes the visitors under his charge. Before he can conduct them to a reception-room, a deep-set oaken door opens, and Editha Morcombe comes out of its shadow to greet them.

Her dress is of some gray stuff, of wide sweeping folds and simplest fashion, altogether regardless of the last puffing, pleating, quilling, flouncing, or gaging ordained by Parisian man-milliners. Her dark-brown hair is arranged with classic neatness; she wears a linen collar, fastened with a knot of rose-hued ribbon. And thus attired, tall, *svelte*, with a certain dignity of carriage which harmonises with her nobility of feature and expression, Editha Morcombe seems to Herman Westray the most

perfect woman he has ever seen. She is not the most beautiful, or most bewitching, or the loveliest, or handsomest of her sex ; she is simply the most perfect. She entirely realises to his mind those deathless lines of Wordsworth's, about

"A perfect woman, nobly plann'd," &c. &c.

She welcomes them with a gracious cordiality. Her manner to the Curate is softened by a gentle reverence, which recognises his sacred calling even in the familiar converse of every-day life.

"Papa is busy with his bailiff," she says, "but will join us directly he is disengaged. Would you like to see the gardens before luncheon ? We have just half an hour, and we can show you the church and schools in the afternoon." This to Westray.

"I should like to see the garden of all things. From the glimpse I had of it as we came, I fancy it is quite my ideal garden."

"Really !" she exclaims, brightening. "I am so fond of our garden ; it reminds me of Tennyson's poetry ; something dreamy and placid and quaint and old. You know the garden in *Maud*?"

"I know that there is a garden in *Maud*, and that the heroine is invited to walk in at just the most unhealthy period of the morning—typhoid and diphtheria rampant ; but I haven't the faintest idea what the garden was like ; whether it consisted of one acre or ten ; whether it went in for ribbon-bordering and bedding-out plants, or essayed the classical, with marble statues and conical cypresses and junipers."

"I know *Maud's* garden by heart, and it was like ours," says Editha, smiling, as she leads them out into the sunshine.

It is a dear old garden ; that one fact is not to be denied. The atmosphere is all warmth and perfume. With the odours of manifold Dijon roses, carnations, jasmine, clematis, mignonette, lemon and oak-leaved geranium, tuberose—all sweet flowers that blow—is mingled the thymy scent of pot-herbs and the savour of ripe apples from the kitchen-garden and orchard near at hand.

There is no costly range of hothouses, like the Crystal Palace in little, but here and there, in odd corners, they come upon a small low-pitched greenhouse squeezed into an angle of the wall, and costing perhaps ten to twenty pounds in the building, full of loveliest exotics or rarest ferns, the cultivation of which is Miss Morcombe's peculiar care. Not for the decoration of a luxurious boudoir, where she may dream her idle hours away, does the Squire's daughter cultivate flower or fern. The best of them are saved for the adornment of that little Gothic church which Herman has marked in the hollow. It is to beautify this

temple on saints' days and church festivals that she rears her seedlings, and rises betimes to tend her fernery, and plans and arranges her succession of fairest blossoms. She has flowers enough and to spare for the beautification of her father's house—especially her invalid sister's rooms—but the church is first in her thoughts and aims. Nor are her pains altogether without tangible reward. The country people flock from far and near to Lochwithian Church at Easter and Whitsuntide, on Ascension-day and at the Harvest Thanksgiving; and Editha's soul is gladdened by the enthusiasm of that rustic flock.

One of the modest little greenhouses is a very bower of stephanotis; the delicate tendrils clothe the sloping roof like a vine, the waxen sprays hang in overpowering profusion.

"One might invent a new suicide here," says Herman, "much nicer than charcoal—done to death with sweetness. And pray what do you do with all these blossoms, Miss Morcombe?"

"We shall want them all for the reredos and reading-desk at the Harvest Festival," she answers; whereupon Mr. Westray discovers that the fairest produce of her garden is dedicated to the church.

"A pretty amusement for young ladies, church decoration," he remarks lightly; "much better than point-lace or decalcomanie, and with some use in it, since the Beautiful is not without its influence upon the masses. But, for my own part, I prefer some solemn old abbey where never a flower has bloomed save in stonework sanctified by ages."

"You can't have your solemn old abbey in every parish," answers Dewrance, "and while man's art can only glorify a city shrine here and there, God gives us flowers enough for every village tabernacle."

Herman shrugs his shoulders. He thinks the subject hardly worth serious discussion. He has a dim sense of devotion in shadowy mediæval cathedrals, or looking at Vandyke's awful picture of the Crucifixion in the church at Antwerp, but his religion is like that of many men in his generation—nothing particular. Yet he has a feeling that religion is a very pretty thing in Editha Morcombe, and that this love of flowers and church decoration is a sweet and womanly sentiment. She is very good to the poor, Dewrance has told him, to little children, to the old and feeble, to the sick an angel of consolation and love. All these things seem good in her, and he feels that she is too good for him; that it would be better for him to marry a milliner or a ballet-girl, who ate peas with her knife, and had hazy ideas as to the objective case, than to be mated to such purity as this.

He sighs as he emerges from the stephanotis bower, and is so lost in thought, that he runs against an energetic gentleman, stout and clerical, with a kindly smiling countenance, and a bull-terrier under his arm. This is Mr. Evan Petherick, incumbent of Lochwithian, and Editha's great ally. A saintly man, if unselfishness, kindliness of heart, and unremitting toil for others are in any wise the elements of saintliness.

"Dear Mr. Petherick," says Editha, turning to him with an affectionate look—he is a second father, or at least an adopted uncle, in the household—"how good of you to come when I asked you! I knew you would like to meet Mr. Dewrance again, you and he get on so well together. Mr. Westray, Mr. Petherick."

Mr. Petherick, who has very little leisure for general literature, greets the stranger somewhat carelessly, and does not take the trouble to inquire if this young man is *the* Mr. Westray. He pounces upon Dewrance, and the two divines walk off together by the sunny wall, where the peaches are ripening behind old fishing-nets, and talk clerical talk, and are happy.

"I should like to look at that old sundial, Miss Morcombe, if I may," says Herman. "If I may" means that he wishes her to show him that relic of antiquity.

They walk across the sunny grass together: she, tall and straight and stately—"queen-rose of the garden;" he, taller by half a head, and as thoroughly a gentleman in outward show as she is a lady. He has a faded look, as of having grown pale for lack of daylight. He looks as if he had worked by night, and lived by night, and as if the sunshine and fresh air were a new sensation to him. He has well-cut features, but the outline of his face is too sharp for beauty—no sculptor would choose him for Apollo or Antinous. He has hazel eyes, large, bright, clear, full of vivacity and expression; hair of a lighter brown than his eyes; whiskers a shade lighter. The chief charm of his countenance lies in its mobility; the mouth has an infinite variety of expression. He is a man about whom people rarely make up their minds all at once; a man who improves upon closer acquaintance, his friends say.

He examines the sundial, with its Latin inscription, and then passes on to the stone basin, full of dark weedy water, athwart which gold-fish are glancing.

"Pets of yours, this finny tribe, I suppose, Miss Morcombe?" hazards Herman.

Editha is sitting on the broad margin of the pool, and throwing morsels of biscuit to the voracious inhabitants. Herman seats himself near her, and thus from talking of gold-fish they slide

into more serious talk—of favourite books, favourite occupations—the dearest interests in the lives of each.

"You live only to do good to others; I live but to win a shred of fame for myself," says Herman at last, with deepest sigh. "How sorry a business my life seems beside yours!"

There is no straighter way to a woman's heart than self-depreciation. Editha is interested in him from this moment.

"If no one sought for fame, I suppose there would be no such thing as greatness," she replies thoughtfully.

"The most lasting fame has been won by goodness rather than talent," answers Herman. "I don't suppose to Englishmen there is any higher name than Grace Darling's or Florence Nightingale's; yet these owe their renown to noble deeds, and not to genius. Come, Miss Morcombe," with a slightly bitter laugh, "you were praising my books just now; would you like to have written them?"

"No," she answers, raising her candid eyes to his; "because to have written them you must have known the worst side of human nature; and God has given me a happy life among good people. I would not have your genius at the cost of your experience."

Herman sighs, and is silent, looking down at the water and the frivolous gold-fish flashing across and across everlastingly, as if they were in a feverish hurry to get somewhere, and, having got there, panted to go back again. Herman knows young men about town who are as unmeaningly restless as these gold-fish.

A gong booms in the hall yonder. The dogs bark. The two Churchmen, who have been pacing up and down by the peach-wall, gesticulating violently, now turn their steps towards the house.

"We are wanted at luncheon," says Editha; whereon Herman rises and offers her his arm, which she takes half-reluctantly, as deeming this a needless ceremony.

The dining-room is oak-panelled, cool, and dark, like the hall. Here are more family portraits—Lelys and Gainsboroughs some of them, but mostly uninteresting; an oaken buffet is well supplied with old family plate; a rose-water dish in silver-gilt repoussé work; a two-handled tankard, puritanical and plain, of the Cromwellian period; and a pair of candelabra. The table is furnished amply, beautified with fruit and flowers; and the Squire, who has finished with his bailiff—a troublesome man, who wants steam-ploughs and threshing-machines, and no end of expensive machinery—greet his guests cheerfully.

"I hope your sister is pretty well to-day, Miss Editha," says

the Incumbent of Lochwithian, when he has said grace ; and Herman remembers that Editha has an elder sister.

"She is better than usual, thanks ; it is one of her good days. You'll go and see her after luncheon, won't you, Mr. Petherick ?"

"Certainly, if I may."

"And what do you think of Editha's greenhouses ?" inquires Mr. Morcombe. "Very shabby affairs compared with conservatories in general, are they not ?"

"I never saw ferns and flowers growing in greater perfection," answers Herman.

"My little girl has built every one of those hothouses out of her pocket-money ; and she and Jones the gardener have been the only architects employed."

"If Editha told me she was going to build a pyramid like King Cheops, I don't think I should be surprised, or doubtful as to the result," exclaims Mr. Petherick. "She has energy enough for anything—that is good," he adds, in an undertone.

Dewrance says nothing, but gazes at the Squire's daughter with eyes of worship. The Squire smiles with a senile blandness, as if his daughter's praise was a sweet-smelling savour.

"How they all love her !" thinks Herman. "It would be ridiculous for any one else to do so. She lives in a circle of praise and love. Hard for a man to break the ring, and say 'she shall belong to me only.'"

"We managed to build the schools between us, at any rate, Mr. Petherick," says Editha radiantly.

"'We' is the idlest flattery on your part," replies the Rector. "You managed to build them ; you gave—begged—borrowed the money ; you drew the design ; you supervised the builders. The foreman told me his men never worked at anything else as they worked at your schools. 'We like to oblige the young lady,' they said to him, 'and she looks right-down pleased when we've got on a goodish bit.' That's what it is to be popular with the working classes, Editha."

After luncheon Dewrance is eager to take Herman off to the church, when Editha comes to them, with a curiously earnest look, as if she were about to approach some important subject.

"If you would not mind, Mr. Westray," she begins shyly, "I should so like to introduce you to my sister. She is a great invalid, poor darling, and rarely sees visitors ; but she has read your books, and been interested in them ; and I think she would like very much to see you. So few literary people come our way ;" with a smile.

"I shall be honoured and happy," replies Herman ; but he follows Editha doubtfully, fearing that he may be about to be

introduced to something unpleasant—something crooked and ugly—a stuffy sick-room, a nurse, and physic-bottles. The rule of his life has been a studious avoidance of all unpleasant things. Even for the purposes of art he has never brought himself face to face with horrors. He has never been inside a hospital, or studied the pauper race in its naked misery, or haunted dead-houses, or penetrated the abodes of crime. His monsters have been developed from his inner consciousness; his morbid anatomy has been exercised on creatures of his own imagination.

He follows Editha up the broad oak staircase, where every newel is surmounted by the Morcombe crest—a lion sejant and regardant—into a lightsome gallery with many doors. One of these she opens, and ushers him into the prettiest sitting-room he has entered for a long time. Boudoirs blue and gold, chintz and satin-wood, ebony and ormolu, he has seen without number, till their elegance has become hackneyed and commonplace; but a room like this, in the full glory of the summer sunshine is new to him.

The walls are painted white, carved garlands of flowers and fruit adorn panelling and cornice, an old Venetian glass over the high chimney-piece reflects a set of dark-blue delf jars, quaint in shape, perfect in colour. In each corner of the room is a triangular glass cupboard, filled with rare old porcelain; in one window there is a fern case; in the other, a cage of tiny crimson-beaked Indian birds. The chairs and tables are of the style made famous by Chippendale; the draperies are embroidered muslin, lined with rose-coloured silk. On a sofa near an open window reclines the mistress of the chamber, dressed in a white-muslin morning-gown, with rose-coloured bows. There is nothing unpleasant to affright Herman's eye, nothing crooked or ugly. He sees a graceful-looking woman reclining on a sofa, with a highly-intelligent face turned towards him—Editha's face as it might look aged by ten years, and sharpened by sickness and pain. He is interested immediately. Suffering which assumes no revolting shape appeals to his best feelings.

"Mr. Westray, my sister," says Editha, after gracious salutations on both sides.

Herman seats himself in the arm-chair nearest the invalid; Editha perches herself on the end of the sofa.

"Now, Ruth," she says gaily, "you can ask Mr. Westray as many questions as you like about his books. You know how we have talked of them. Cross-examine him thoroughly; pluck out the heart of his mystery. You won't mind, will you?" half apologetically to Herman.

She is gayer, more unconstrained than he has seen her yet. This elder sister is her second self: she is doubly strong when she has Ruth to sustain her.

"Can I object to the question from such fair inquisitors?" exclaims Herman with an amused look.

"Pray, Mr. Westray, how did you come to have such a bad opinion of your fellow-creatures?" asks Ruth gravely.

Herman pulls his whisker with a puzzled air.

"Upon my word, I don't know that I have a bad opinion of mankind," he replies thoughtfully; "I like them very well in detail, though in the mass I am ready to agree with Miss Editha's favourite, Tennyson, that 'however we brave it out, we men are a little breed.'"

"Your books are so clever," says Ruth thoughtfully; "but I have always thought it a pity there are not more good people in them."

Westray shrugs his shoulders.

"My dear Miss Morcombe, goodness from an æsthetic point of view is the reverse of interesting. Faust is not good, Mephistopheles is candidly execrable; but where can you match these for interest? Othello is a grand and faulty being, overshadowed somewhat by the splendid iniquity of Iago. Macbeth belongs to the criminal classes. Virtue is so simple a matter, that it affords few opportunities for art. Vice and crime are complex, many-sided, and offer infinite scope for the literary anatomist. There is no ground for speculation in the fact that a man does right; it is only when he errs that he becomes enigmatic and interesting.

"Yet Goldsmith has ventured to depict characters that are almost faultless."

"Goldsmith was a humorist, and could afford to paint virtue. Humour relieves the insipidity of his hero's benevolence; but Primrose described by a man without humour would have been an intolerable nuisance."

"Thackeray has given us Colonel Newcome."

"A humorist again. With any one less than Thackeray the dear old colonel would have been an ineffable twaddler. And you will allow that even Thackeray's finest piece of work is not good Colonel Newcome, but bad Becky Sharpe."

Ruth sighs, and looks at the speaker for a minute or so with dreamy eyes, deep in thought.

"I wonder sometimes," she says presently, "that among so many books written for this generation, there are so few that seem calculated to make people better."

Westray shrugs his shoulders again, and begins to think this

white panelled chamber is something of a trap. Here he sits, helpless, between two serious-minded young women—he who has ever set his face against female serious-mindedness.

"That is why I love Tennyson," cries Editha triumphantly; "one cannot read him without feeling better and braver; he raises the whole tone of one's being. His Arthur is the prince of gentlemen; his Enid is the type of noblest womanhood; Maud, Dora, the Gardener's Daughter, the Miller's Daughter, Lady Clare—who has ever painted such a gallery of true and pure women?"

"One Gretchen—victim and fallen—is to my mind worth all this cold perfection," says Herman irreverently.

Tennyson is the Aristides of modern literature, and younger singers are apt to grow weary of hearing him praised.

Happily for Herman Westray, Mr. Petherick peeps in at the door, the bull-terrier under his arm.

"I thought you would like to see Topsy," he says to Miss Morcombe.

Topsy is on the sofa in a moment, performing wild evolutions over the invalid's muslin draperies, and nestling against her pale cheek.

"Go and show Mr. Westray the church, Editha," says the Rector, handing her a key; "Dewrance is waiting for you somewhere, I believe. Your sister and I are going to have a long talk."

Ruth smiles at him tenderly; he is one of her most cherished friends. Those patient fingers of hers are never tired of working for his poor. He tells her all the troubles of his life—other people's troubles, for the most part—and she gives him comfort and counsel. There is a heavenly repose for him in this quiet room; Ruth's society is the holiday-time of his every-day life.

Editha and Herman go out into the garden, and by a shrubby path that winds down the hill, to a little gate which opens into the churchyard.

"A pretty church, isn't it?" asks Editha, looking up at the slim Gothic spire, with its trefoiled finials and quaint waterspouts. "My dear mother built it the year before she died. It was her legacy to Lochwithian."

"Mother an heiress, evidently," thinks Herman.

They go into the church together, and Westray praises the interior warmly.

It is perfect in its way, every detail carried out with extreme care. There is no pretence to splendour, but an exquisite purity distinguishes all. The prevailing tones are gray and white—polished Aberdeen granite and purest white marble. There is a memorial window over the altar—Christ bearing the cross, copied

from a famous Raffaele; and on each side a smaller window—one the Good Shepherd; the other, the Light of the World. These make a glow of colour in the narrow chancel.

They go into the vestry, where, over a fine old oak muniment chest, hangs a careful water-colour copy of Vandyke's Crucifixion—that awful lonely figure against a sky of deepest gloom.

"Who painted that?" asks Herman.

"My sister; she used to be very fond of painting when she was stronger. I do not mean that she was ever very strong, or able to move about much; but she has been weaker lately. The fatigue of holding an easel would be too much for her now."

"How sad for her! This copy is remarkably good."

"I am so glad to hear you say that," exclaims Editha, brightening.

"Your sister seems to be as clever as she is charming."

"You think her nice? It is so sweet to hear her praised. She is so good, utterly perfect, I sometimes think; for I never discovered any fault in her. She has borne suffering with a sublime patience. She is all charity, and love, and thought for others. Sinless herself, she is full of mercy for sinners. When Mr. Petherick has a difficult subject among his people, he brings the person to my sister. I have never known Ruth's influence fail. She has softened the hardest hearts."

"You have reason to be proud and fond of her," replies Herman, touched by her enthusiasm. The women of his peculiar circle are not given to unmeasured praise of their sisters.

"And now will you show me the ruins?" he asks. "I am curious to explore the foundations of the old Priory."

"I can't imagine what has become of Mr. Dewrance," says Editha, feeling that she is not behaving fairly to one guest in devoting herself exclusively to the other.

"He is with Mr. Morcombe, no doubt. It is nearly five, and I know he means to leave here at half-past. Please show me the ruins."

"Come along, then," laughs Editha, "if you are so anxious to see them. But there is no reason why you should not come here again."

"None," says Herman, "except—" and at that word stops dead.

Editha does not notice the unfinished sentence. She leads him through the Priory stables, and across a newly-planted orchard to the verdant hollow where the ruins of the old walls stand, lichen-darkened, with mosses, spleenwort, and various members of the ferny tribe flourishing in the interstices of the rough gray stones, honeycombed by wind and weather; and then when she has

shown him the remains of wall and column they cross a little wooden bridge, and stray ever so far along the bank of the narrow stream, the wooded hill-side towering above them, and at their feet flowering rushes and yellow water-lilies, and a profusion of forget-me-nots, pink and blue.

Here they talk of all manner of things, and forget the inexorable march of time; and Herman Westray acknowledges within himself, wonderingly, that even the society of a serious-minded young lady may be pleasant.

"It is all very well among these Welsh hills," he reasons; "one's mind is attuned to this kind of thing. But if I were to meet Editha Morcombe in London next season, I daresay I should find her awfully slow."

An hour later, and the two young men have driven away in the dog-cart, after the refreshment of five o'clock tea, and Editha sits on the end of her sister's sofa, discussing their new acquaintance.

"Do you like him, Ruth? Do you think him as nice as his books? You are such a judge of character, darling, I want to know if you really like him."

Ruth pauses thoughtfully before replying.

"He has a clever, interesting face, dear; and I think he is better than his books. But then you know they never impressed me favourably, brilliant as they are. Yes, I think him very nice, Editha. But I would not for all the world that you should think of him too favourably."

"Why, you absurd darling!" cries Editha, blushing to the roots of her hair, "I have only seen him twice in my life, and may never meet him again. He came here to-day to see the Priory, not to see me. And I believe he is going away from Llandrysak almost immediately."

"I hope it may be so, dearest," says Ruth; and then, after a pause, resumes with deepest earnestness: "O, my darling, you know that, come when it may, our parting will almost break my heart; but Heaven knows that I would not delay that bitter time for an hour if I thought it was for your happiness to leave me. Let the husband of your choice be but worthy, dear, my warmest affection shall go with him when he takes you from me."

"Why, you silliest Ruth! who was talking of partings, or husbands, or any such dismalities? Do you suppose I am so wonderful a creature that a man cannot see me without wanting to marry me?"

"If he saw you with my eyes, dear, it would be difficult for him to pass you by."

CHAPTER III.

"O Love! thy province were not large,
 A bounded field, nor st etching far,
 Look also, Love, a brooding star,
 A rosy warmth from marge to marge."

RICHARD DEWRANCE, the curate, is a kindly soul, never happier than when he is giving pleasure to others, whether the objects of his benevolence be a troop of small school-children more given to dispense with the use of pocket-handkerchiefs than society approves, or a band of bright-looking girls, who revere him as a modern edition of St. Paul. Three days after the visit to Lochwithian Priory he is busy organising a picnic—nothing formal or costly; no champagne or perigord-pie; no hired musicians or blue-jacketed postillions, or useless profusion of comestibles; but a gipsy tea-drinking at the Shaky Bridge; for Mr. Dewrance, belonging in some slight degree to the tame-cat family, is a prodigious tea-drinker, and all his ideas of personal enjoyment include the consumption of carefully-blended pekoe and congou.

The Cambria is a great place for the clerical fraternity. The drawing-room of the Lords is a church congress in little; everybody talks church—stories about So-and-so who has just been made a bishop, What's-his-name whom we all remember so well at Jesus College, the restoration of Penryderch Abbey, the dilapidation of Penmaenmawr Cathedral, schools, Easter offerings, church commissioners, choirs, harmoniums, organs, altar-cloths, rubric, chants, harvest festivals, are the prevailing topics. Happily these black-coated gentry are usually provided with daughters pleasant or pretty—nay, for the most part pretty; for though the Welsh commonalty are not altogether lovely, gentle blood shows fresh and fair among these breezy hills.

The young ladies are all on the alert for picnics, walks, drives, fern-hunts—what you will.

"We must see the Shaky Bridge," says Mr. Dewrance at luncheon, seated luxuriously before a salad of his own compounding, with two pretty girls on each side of him—the off-siders craning their young necks to see and hear him. "Delicious walk across the hills—much better than driving round by the road. I suppose you young ladies can all manage a matter of six miles or so, there and back?"

Can they? They laugh at such a question.

"Well, then, I propose a gipsy tea. We can send everything on ahead, and boil our own kettle."

"Which is all the fun of the fair; especially if the wind is the wrong way, the wood damp, and the kettle obstinately averse from boiling," says Westray, who has his own band of admirers on the other side of the table. It has leaked out somehow, much to his dissatisfaction, that he is the Mr. Westray who writes novels.

"A gipsy tea—delicious!" cry the young ladies.

"Then that's decided. Say the day after to-morrow. The weather seems settled."

"Glass going up," remarks a practical parson.

"You might ask Miss Morcombe to join us," suggests Herman casually.

"That sweet young lady who gave the prize at the Eisteddfod? O, do ask her, Mr. Dewrance! She looks so nice," exclaims Miss Milner, the daughter of a fine-looking jovial Welsh parson, perpetual curate of a distant parish, a man brimming over with quiet humour—a man whose talk, whether lay or ecclesiastic, is always worth hearing.

"She is nice," answers Herman; "and this Shaky Bridge is half way between here and Lochwithian. The Squire and his daughter could easily meet us there."

"Do you suppose the Squire would forego his seven o'clock dinner for the sake of your gipsy tea?" says Dewrance. "No; I have a better plan for getting Miss Morcombe. I'll ask Petherick and his nieces, two charming little girls who keep his house, and ask Miss Morcombe to come with them. She's fond of Petherick, and is sure to come if he asks her."

"Astutest of men!" cries Herman, more pleased than the occasion warrants.

He will see her again—Maud of the rose-garden, with her clear-cut face, not proud but sweet. Yet he can fancy that noble face could harden into pride, grow fixed as marble, were the noble mind outraged, the strong sense of right assailed, the grand contempt for meanness once aroused. He has seen so little of her, yet the knowledge of her character seems to have crept into his inmost heart, to be rooted there, as if he had known her all his life. Or is it only guesswork at best?

Dewrance completes the arrangements for his picnic that afternoon. He has acquired many accomplishments in his varied career, and is above all things excellent in the commissariat department. He telegraphs to Shrewsbury for the choicest fruit—the strawberries, gooseberries, and currants purveyed in Llandrysak being at once desultory and squashy—and for a

liberal supply of those dainty cakes for which the ancient city is famous. He orders cream and butter from a farmhouse among the hills, and a box of crispest rolls and toothsome varieties of fancy-bread from a Polish baker in Regent-street. He is not a man to content himself with the limited resources of Llandrysak.

The day comes—a blazer, cloudless blue, not a breath stirring the pine-branches ; every jingle of the tumblers in the pump-room, every click of the billiard-balls in the open-windowed chamber above, painfully audible in the sultry stillness. A glorious day for Flora and Ponto and Scrub, the dogs of the establishment, who lie flat on their sides on the sunny gravel, and growl faintly at the passing stranger—languid remonstrance which, taken in conjunction with the weather, seems indicative of hydrophobic tendencies.

Herman roams restlessly all the morning—in and out, up and down—like a perturbed spirit ; now in the dusky pine-grove ; now on the broiling croquet-lawn ; now in the empty billiard-room, making unmeaning canons with misused energy. Anon he goes down to the green hollow behind the Cambria, a bosky dell in whose bottom lies a shining lake of clear blue water, rush-bordered, full of deeps and shallows, whereon the more juvenile-minded of the Cambrians do sometimes disport themselves in a shallop, or perchance wherry, with a striped-canvas awning. He stands upon the reedy margin and throws stones into the water, and muses with despondent air, doubtless full of fancies for his next novel, weaving his plot, arranging his dramatic personages—or possibly thinking of that comedy for Mrs. Brandreth's theatre which he began so briskly the other day, but wherewith he has made but little progress since the Eisteddfod.

“How my mother would have admired that girl!” he says to himself, those fickle fancies of his shifting from the phantasmal world of polite comedy to real life and Editha Morcombe. “She is just the kind of girl for good women to admire, and for erring men to reverence and—avoid ; just too good to make a pleasant easy-going wife. How few men of letters have ever mated with your superior woman ! Perhaps Shelley is the only instance—and he found his happiness by a fluke. I daresay Rousseau and Goethe knew best when they reduced their aspirations to the level of their kitchens.”

He throws another stone into the lake, smooth as the placidest millpond this summer noon, and then strolls back to the fore-court of the Cambria, where Dewrance—his arrangements complete, his soul at ease—reclines on his favourite bench, lazily consuming a cigar

"What ails thee, sultry wanderer?" he asks languidly. "Thy countenance is disturbed."

"It's consumedly hot," replies Herman peevishly. "Among your various messages you ought to have telegraphed to the clerk of the weather for a light breeze. You expect us to walk across a broiling hill-side under a flaming sun, and call that pleasure. Any reply from Miss Morcombe or Mr. Petterick?"

"No, they have not troubled to write. They'll be there, I daresay; and if they're not—well, you'll be all the happier without a serious young woman. Those Misses Pynsents from Swansea are rather frisky than otherwise, and no end of money. Iron, you know."

"Iron be—Bessemered!" exclaimed Herman ferociously. "I think when people receive an invitation the least thing they can do is to reply to it. At least, that is the prevailing opinion in the civilised parts of Europe. In Wales, I daresay—"

"O, the Welsh do answer letters," replies Dewrance. "It's their postal arrangements that are to blame in this case, no doubt. Miss Morcombe has written, and her letter has gone to Shrewsbury, or London, or Milford Haven, or Holyhead, *en route* for Llandrysak. I shall get it the day after to-morrow, if trains are propitious."

Herman sighs impatiently, lights a cigar—his third since breakfast—and turns upon his heel.

He goes into the house. A piano rattles violently in the drawing-room, where a young lady is hammering out Thalberg's "Last Rose of Summer." There are voices and laughter and banging of doors on the ground floor. Herman looks neither to the right nor the left, but goes up to his own room, a large airy chamber at the back of the house, overlooking the lake and the wooded slopes that rise from it, and the green sheep-walks above, and the little ancient parish church yonder in a cleft of the hills, hard by a farmyard, and little better than a barn—the humblest tabernacle surely that was ever dedicated to divinity.

Herman Westray's despatch-box stands open on the table by the window—a despatch-box whose perfect appliances and elegant luxury might tempt the most slothful of scribes. Mr. Westray seats himself before this machine, plays with an ivory paper-cutter, screws and unscrews a pencil-case, looks at his watch, ticking soberly in a morocco watch-stand in the lid of the despatch-box, looks at the day of the month indicated on an ivory tablet, and lastly, from one of the pockets intended for envelopes of official size, draws a photograph in a velvet frame.

A woman's photograph naturally, or that thoughtful look—half

tenderness, half perplexity—would hardly cloud his face as he contemplates it. A woman's face, delicately painted as a miniature on ivory—not a common face, yet not absolutely beautiful; features small and finely cut, eyes darkest hazel, hair auburn—the real auburn, the rich red-brown of a newly-fallen chestnut from which the husk has just parted. And such hair! It falls over the slender figure like a mantle—falls almost to the knees. The woman is dressed in some loose semiclassic robe, girdled at the waist, high to the throat, but sleeveless, leaving the small round arm bare to the shoulder, the tapering hand displayed to perfection. The photographer must have been an artist who posed the lady for this portrait.

Herman replaces the photograph with a sigh.

"I ought to write my best for her," he says to himself; and turns over some loose sheets of Bath-post closely written upon, and erases a word or a line here and there, or writes a word or line in the margin.

"'Enter Sir Bergamot Papillion—' No, the comic muse is not propitious to-day. Smiling Thalia averts her face. After all I am not quite clear that I shall write a piece of the Rochester and Sedley period; something classical would suit Myra better, if I could get a happy idea."

Herman Westray drops his pen, and looks dreamily out of the window. In a general way he goes at his work in a business-like manner—gives his Pegasus a free rein, and gets over the ground at a sharp trot, regular as clockwork. As a rule he invokes no assistance from the Muses, but dips his pen in the inkpot, and writes wittily, wisely, or stupidly, as the Fates decree—but he covers his paper. Time was—nay, not so long ago—when he wrote for bread. He thinks of those days now, as he looks out at the sleepy summer landscape, the warm golden light on wood and hill and water-pools—thinks of his past life and its varieties of fortune. How, ten years ago, he came home from Balliol to find the good old vicar his father on his deathbed; and how, when the undertaker was paid and other creditors were satisfied, the slenderest pittance was left for the widow and her two daughters—for the son nothing but the work of his head or his hands. The little family at home had pinched and saved to give the lad a university education; and Herman had known this, and had striven his hardest to be worthy of their loving sacrifice. He had taken honours and won a scholarship, and made his father's last days happy with the knowledge of his success. To this son the father committed his helpless wife and girls. "You will have only Herman to look to, my dears. Under Providence, Herman will take care of you."

Herman accepted the trust. No lack of earnestness in his nature or straightforwardness in his aims in those days, whatever there may be now. Herman in poverty was almost sublime. He lived upon his scholarship, took men to read with him, utilised his vacations, and contrived somehow to add to his mother's narrow means. Mother and daughters lived placidly and happily in a pillbox of a house in a quiet Devonshire watering-place, respected, beloved, doing good in their small way. And here, so long as his mother lived, Herman spent the brief holiday-time of his busy life.

When his scholarship expired he came to London, and, by the influence of an old friend of his father's, was placed on the staff of a famous daily paper. He had taught himself shorthand at Oxford, *pour se distraire*, and was able to take his place in the reporters' gallery without delay. In course of time it was discovered that he had a fine slashing style, and from reporting he took to leader-writing, at which patent manufacture of bricks without straw he worked for the next five years of his life; sometimes varying his denunciations of the Opposition, his graphic pictures of startling trial or social tragedy, his humorous essays on breach-of-promise cases, his Juvenalian diatribes against the vices of modern society, with a sound and exhaustive review of some important book. A useful man eminently on a daily paper; well-read, reckless to audacity, brilliant, various. The time came, however, when journalism failed to satisfy Herman Westray's ambition or occupy his mind; imagination demanded a wider field. He gave his spare hours—time that should have been given to sleep for the most part—to the composition of a picture of modern society; in other words, a novel. The book was published; his fellow-workers of the daily press blew their trumpets loud and shrill, and Herman Westray was famous. There was just enough sparkle, originality, or eccentricity in the book to amuse men; just enough colour and passion to interest women. The novel was therefore popular alike in club and boudoir; and Herman's success fully justified his withdrawal from newspaper work, save for occasional critical articles, the authorship whereof gave him power among his brothers of the pen. His first novel had been followed by a successful comedy, his comedy by a second novel, pronounced an advance on the first. Since then he had written more plays and more novels, and had published a volume of lyrics which some among the critics pronounced not unworthy of Heine, while others denounced the writer as at once trivial, immoral, and blasphemous.

He had made money also, and had exchanged a second floor

in Essex-street, Strand, for chambers in Piccadilly; not large, but costly. He had seen a good deal of the best society, and not a little of the worst. In a word, he had lived his life, without much thought of the future, with some forgetfulness of the past; his mother being dead by this time, and his sisters lacking that influence for good which she had exercised to the last.

And now he has come to Llandrysak for rest of body and mind—sorely needing both—expecting to find here a placid bovine existence, far from the region of fervid desires and ardent hopes. Yet already his mind is fluttered, his body restless; that sweet empty life of the lotus-land remains for him no more. He ought to be lying yonder in some ripple of that ferny hill, looking up at the blue summer sky, listening idly to the hum of vagabond bee, the tinkle of distant sheep-bell.

“Poor Myra,” he sighs at last, “it’s no use trying to work to-day. Sir Bergamot is dumb as the Sphinx. The new comedy must stand over till I feel more in the vein. Provoking rather, for I thought I should have dashed off my three acts in a week or so, and taken the piece back to London with me. I know Myra is anxious about her opening piece, and this Frivolity is a serious undertaking for that nervous little soul—or would be serious if there were not resources in the background.”

He sighs, puts away his papers, locks up his despatch-box, and goes down-stairs again, having made as little use of his morning as it is possible for a man to make. In half an hour the luncheon-bell will ring, and luncheon to-day will, for the gipsy tea-party, mean dinner, for they contemplate walking home by moonlight, and it will be ten o’clock most likely ere the Cambria sees them safely housed.

“After all, I came down here for a rest,” reflects Herman, “and I don’t see why I should worry myself into a fever about Myra’s comedy.”

He saunters to the pine-grove, where the water-drinkers—looking always more or less like the inmates of a private lunatic asylum—are seated here and there on rustic benches in a low-spirited manner, doing nothing, looking at nothing, to all appearances thinking of nothing.

Not so Herman. He lights a cigar, and gives himself up to severe thought. He muses on his present condition of life, and wonders if it is altogether the best and happiest existence he could make for himself. It is a pleasant thing to know that when he puts on his hat he covers all his responsibilities; that measles may decimate the infant population, and he be none the worse; that the advance in the prices of coals and butcher’s meat

can affect him but lightly. Yet it is not altogether soothing to consider that, were he to die to-morrow, there is no one—save those dear girls in Devonshire, on whom he bestows a passing thought once in six weeks or so—who would particularly regret his departure. Yes, perhaps one other person would be genuinely sorry, for a little while; but every thought connected with that other person is more or less a pain, and he shrinks from the question of her feelings.

People are always telling him that he ought to marry; that it would be better for himself, better for his career, that he should be more heavily weighted in the race of life. Existence is too easy for him, these wise ones say. He is in danger of becoming selfish, cynical, if he has not already acquired the vices of egotism and cynicism. He is in danger of hardening into the bachelor Sybarite who thinks his club is “going to the deuce, you know,” if his favourite table is preëngaged or his cutlet overdone.

Luncheon is over, and at three o'clock the gipsy party have begun their march, with Dewrance as pilot. He knows every meadow and hill and wooded gorge and watercourse for twenty miles round Llandrysak, though he has only inhabited that inland watering-place for a couple of months. His friends have mustered strong—the ladies in an alarming majority—but Dewrance himself is equal to six ordinary bachelors, and Westray, as a popular author, counts double. Mr. Milner, perpetual curate of an unpronounceable parish in the north, has a knot of admiring listeners to his really delightful conversation. The way by which they go is delicious, through narrow paths, between deep stony banks clothed with ferns and foxgloves, mosses and lichens, pine-trees rising tall on the rough slopes above; then past a group of mighty beeches on a grassy knoll, across a farmyard and a wide stretch of undulating meadow land, where the cattle stand at gaze as the merry pedestrians go by. The gates are tall and stiff, regular five-barred gates, and rigidly padlocked against the straying of cattle; and these Mr. Dewrance and his party have to climb—toil provocative of much mirth. From the last of the meadows they come into perhaps the prettiest bit of all that varied walk: a narrow path on the top of the steep bank of a torrent, deeply cloven in the hill; a shallow stream rushes over the rocky bed of this wooded gorge, and one just sees the shine of water through the interlacing branches of oak and ash, sapling and undergrowth.

This walk by the torrent winds up the shoulder of the hill.

“Don't look round, one of you, till you come to the top,” cries Dewrance; whereupon everybody turns instantaneously, and

there is a simultaneous gush of admiration. Behind them, around them everywhere in the sunny distance, rise the hills, green and brown, darkly wooded, bright with verdure, bleak and barren, craggy and bold, steeped in the summer light, painted against the deep blue sky.

“How lovely!”

“Scene-painter!” roars Westray, in the voice of the gallery demanding Mr. Telbin.

“You ought to have waited till you got to the brow of the hill,” says Dewrance, vexed that a *coup de théâtre* should be lost.

They pause again at the gate which crests the hill, and look back again. The panorama is a little wider; they see deeper into the smiling valley, where the river Pennant winds like a wandering thread of silver. They look at the white homesteads scattered far apart among the hills, and think how sinless and placid life might be in such fair solitudes; and every one of them is for the moment as ardent a worshipper of Nature as Wordsworth himself.

The air blows fresh on these green heights, and has a flavour of the salt sea. This wide grassy hill which they are to cross is called Cymbrie's Bank, the word “bank” sufficing for the loftiest hill in these regions.

Dewrance walks gaily on with his circle of fair young votaries. He is telling them stories of his foreign experience—stories romantic, tragical, absorbing, to which the listeners lend attentive ears, the Curate excelling in the art of narration. Over that wide green hill, and then along the breast of another hill, and anon they see a sharp peak before them, crowned with a mound or earthen breastwork—all that remains of a Roman fortress, according to Welsh tradition and Richard Dewrance.

They go down the green slope, and into a stony-hearted lane; a lane that should be green and grassy, but which some rural proprietor, for his own pleasure, has paved with rough boulders; a lane which to young ladies with three-inch heels to their boots must be a place of torture. Our Welsh maidens trip across the rugged stones easily enough, and the stony-hearted lane is pleasantly shaded by tall hedges of hazel and sloe, blackberry, dog-rose, oak sapling, and crab-apple, and all sweet things that flourish by the wayside. After the lane there is a brook to cross; and then a little thicket, a gap in a hedge to get through—and they are at the Shaky Bridge.

He is not a mighty beast, this Welsh lion; not by any means a marvel of engineering as applied to bridges. He consists of a couple of ancient planks, considerably the worse for wear, slung across the narrow river by means of loose wires, which rattle

wofully at every step of the passenger. But mild as the beast is, he has wrought terror in many a gentle breast, and Mr. Dewrance's young ladies scream and exclaim not a little as they trip lightly across this primitive suspension-bridge. But if not the bridge itself, assuredly the landscape in which it is set deserves the fame it has won: that placid valley; that winding river, with its ferny banks and over-shadowing trees; that simple village church on the higher ground yonder, with its lop-sided wooden tower, its ivied wall, ivy among which roses red and white have entwined themselves lovingly. The long narrow valley is shut in by hills—loftier crests rising in the middle distance above the fortress-crowned peak which stands boldly out in the foreground.

"Well, Westray, do you think the Shaky Bridge is worth a three-mile walk?" inquires Dewrance of his friend.

Herman has not taken pains to make himself agreeable during the pilgrimage, but has been disposed to hang behind in self-communion, to the aggravation of some of the young ladies, who compare him unfavourably with the Curate, and decide that he puts all his cleverness into his books.

"Yes," replies Herman, looking listlessly round, "the scenery is pretty enough; rather teaboardy; but it isn't Nature's fault that landscape painters have vulgarised her: nice little tumble-down old church—'near yonder copse where once a garden smiled'—and that kind of thing."

He is angry with Miss Morcombe for not being here; still more angry with himself for feeling the whole thing a failure without her. There are no signs of her or of the Pethericks. The young man with the light cart, which has brought the comes-tibles, is the only human object in the landscape.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," cries Mr. Dewrance blithely, "the first part of the entertainment will be 'five, six, picking up sticks,' as the nursery rhyme says. We want no end of firewood for our kettle."

Away speed the damsels gaily, the younger among the gentlemen active in their assistance. Dewrance takes Mr. Milner to look at the church.

"Come with us, Westray, won't you?" he roars, looking back; and Herman follows listlessly, thinking of that comedy for Mrs. Brandreth's theatre, and how he is to find a telling situation for the end of the second act.

The church-door is open, and seated in the porch, discoursing with an ancient and toothless female, they discover the Reverend David Petherick, incumbent of Lochwithian, Topsy the bull-terrier curled up at his feet. Herman brightens, and for the moment forgets his inchoate comedy.

He shakes hands with the Reverend David, he caresses Topsy, he peers into the dusky little church. Yes, she is there alone, standing in a thoughtful attitude, looking up at one of the homely tablets.

"My nieces are over the hills and far away," says Mr. Petherick, "but Editha is in there."

Herman goes in, leaving the three Churchmen in the porch. He is close beside her before she is aware of his coming, and then she turns and looks.

"'And suddenly, sweetly, strangely blush'd,'" says Herman inwardly, quoting her favourite poet.

Yes, she blushes at sight of him; only the bright brief blush that bespeaks surprise, of course.

"I did not know you were to be here," she says, as they shake hands. "In fact, I really thought you had gone back to London."

He had talked of a speedy departure the other day at Lochwithian.

"No, I get fonder of your country as I know it better."

They go round the little church together, looking at the tablets, slate or marble, setting forth the virtues of departed Joneses, Lloyds, Williamses, Morgans, and Davises, and talking a little in subdued tones, as befits the sacred building. Such a quaint, old-world little church, with high wooden pews, square, spacious, but as uncomfortable as the carpenter's art could make them; the benches mere shelves; small latticed windows, squeezed here and there into the walls, with a view to convenience rather than architectural effect, dimly illumine the white-washed interior. The only attempt at uniformity has been in the three narrow windows over the communion table, and one of these has been walled up by a ponderous monument to some departed Prices, who have been a power in the land.

There is not much to look at, but the little there is seems eminently interesting to Herman. He lingers before every tablet; he leans with folded arms upon one of the pew-doors while he questions Editha about her life. He is making a study of her for his next novel; his interest in her is purely æsthetic—on that point he has no doubt.

"You have never found life at Lochwithian monotonous; never sighed for any wider world?" he asks.

"Never. I do not say that I have not sometimes wished to travel. I suppose that is a natural wish with every one—to see all that is strange and lovely in this wonderful world."

Herman sighs. For his own part he seems to have turned the world inside out, like an old glove, and left nothing to be desired in it.

"But the thought that Ruth could not go with me, and the thought of how much I should leave behind me in our dear old home," she resumes, "has always checked the wish for change or distance."

"Yet you do not mean to spend all your days at Lochwithian? You might as well be a nun at once."

"There is nothing appalling to my mind in the idea of a convent," answers Editha, smiling; "if there were any vow that I could make to bind me to Ruth, I would willingly make it—her happiness is so dependent upon me—poor darling."

"Would it not be wise to begin at once to train somebody to take your place, your ultimate departure being inevitable? Some lucky fellow—an earnest young Churchman, for instance, like Dewrance—will persuade you to exchange your sphere of action for a rather wider one. You will be the ideal pastor's wife."

"Thanks for the compliment," answers Editha lightly. "I am too happy at home to be in any hurry for the coming of the ideal pastor."

"He will come some day, be sure."

Poor Dewrance looks in at the door at this moment, showing those even white teeth of his under a somewhat unclerical moustache.

"Miss Morcombe—Westray, we are here to enjoy the scenery; don't waste your time looking at those uninteresting tablets."

"I have found them full of interest," says Herman.

They come out of the church at the Curate's bidding, and saunter round the churchyard, which is a curiously one-sided necropolis, the Welsh insisting upon being buried with their faces to the east, so that they may be ready at the great trumpet-call. The humble graves are neatly kept; some curiously paved with pebbles, some decorated with flowers, some with cut branches of box stuck close together, and others with box planted densely and cut into the shape of a coffin. This last design is evidently esteemed the most *recherché* thing in graves.

They gaze and loiter, Editha explaining all that needs explanation in the rustic scene. They talk freely, as they talked the other day by the rushy margin of the river, and it seems somehow to both of them that they have been friends and companions for a long time.

Herman finds himself talking of his own feelings, his own history: sure sign that his companion is sympathetic, for he is not given to egotistical prosings. He tells Editha of his youth, touching lightly upon his struggles, but owning without reserve that he has laboured for his bread.

"And now, after pulling against the tide for a goodish time,

"I find myself at thirty in smooth water," he says; "and I have nothing to do but drift quietly with the stream and keep on the sunny side of the river, or, in other words, make the most and best of my life."

"But you will go on working?" exclaims Editha, with a surprised look; "your ambition is not dead?"

His only answer for the moment is a sigh.

"Progress is a grand word," he says at last, "but how few they are who have the elements of progress in their nature! To go up like a rocket, and come down like a stick seems the natural tendency of human genius. Bulwer Lytton, the most varied genius since Shakespeare, is the only man I can think of at this moment whose power was always growing."

"Was not that because he had an inexhaustible ambition, and a just and modest appreciation of his genius, and loved his art for its own sake, without consideration of fee or reward? For my own part, when people say they are not ambitious, I always fancy they mean that they are idle."

"Perhaps you are right," replies Herman. "A man may go on working, and work hard, in a groove, and seem a pattern of industry, without any great mental effort. The strain only comes when he strives to rise above complacent mediocrity."

And then after a pause he says thoughtfully:

"I had more ambition before my mother died. Any little success I made was such a delight to her. Every word of praise given to me was to her a pearl of price. Perhaps if I had some one as keenly interested in my future, I should work harder, have nobler aspirations, be less content with the bread-and-cheese of literature."

"You have sisters; they must be warmly interested in you."

"A sister's interest is like a draught of new milk to a thirsty traveller—refreshing, but not inspiring."

"I would rather have Ruth's praise or Ruth's interest than any one else's," says Editha.

"Yes, women as a rule like milk-and-water, but even the soberest men prefer a dash of alcohol in their drink."

They stroll down the valley to the little sheltered nook near the bridge, where the gipsy-fire is blazing merrily, and is the cause of much merriment in others. Tea is ready, but tea-cups are scarce, and every one cannot be supplied at once. There is the river conveniently close, however, and plenty of tea-cloths in the basket; so the washing of cups and saucers in the running streams affords a diverting employment to some of the young ladies and one very young gentleman. Conspicuous among these skirmishers are Mr. Petherick's nieces, who have little to

recommend them to notice beyond the length of their legs and the shortness of their petticoats, being in that stage of rapid and inconvenient growth when frocks seem to shrink palpably day by day. Shrewsbury cakes, Polish bread, strawberries, big crimson cherries, are fully appreciated by the revellers after that three-mile walk. Dewrance, in his character of host at this open-air banquet, is simply admirable. The ladies consume orange pekoe in an alarming manner, like the young woman made famous by Sam Weller. The kettle is an inexhaustible source of excitement, and romantic young ladies feel that this is gipsy life indeed. After tea, the younger and more frivolous of the party go and swing upon the Shaky Bridge, to the apparent endangerment of that frail fabric; others wander away in twos and threes, or muster strong round Dewrance.

"Now, remember," he says, as they prepare to scatter themselves, "we all meet here at half-past eight. We shall have moonlight for our walk home."

"Delicious!" gasp the young ladies; "you plan everything so nicely, Mr. Dewrance!"—as if he had telegraphed to some London firm for the moon.

Herman and Editha climb the hill in the foreground. He has asked her to show him the Roman earthwork. The sunburnt sward is slippery as glass, save where the bracken gives firmer foothold. Herman grasps Editha's hand now and then in perilous places; not that she has much need of his assistance, for her foot is fleet and firm as Atalanta's. They reach the summit breathless, but not weary, and have the little mound with its scooped-out basin all to themselves. From this height they survey the rest of the picnickers, straying here and there; the group of admiring females round Dewrance; the two pastors, Milner and Petherick, pacing soberly by the river.

"Nice to feel oneself quite away from the rest of the world!" exclaims Herman.

He examines the earthwork, which to the wisest of archæologists says very little—and Herman is no archæologist. His mind is too purely literary, too imaginative and poetical in its bent, to affect the dry bones of history. Upon his eye all that is fair in the past shines beautiful and glorious like a picture; he has no taste for looking on the other side of the canvas, or for anatomising the bright and living image that charms his fancy.

They seat themselves upon the low bank, and watch the sunset almost in silence. Gorgeously, in billows of crimson and purple, sinks the golden round; fiery and splendid, like the brazen target of a victor in the fight. Who should find many words in the presence of that awful splendour?

"Do you remember what Mirabeau said of the sun on his deathbed?" asks Herman, as the gleaming edge of the disk dips and vanishes in a sea of molten gold. "If he is not God, he is His cousin-german."

Far away stretches the undulating landscape, gilded by that western glory. A beautiful world verily; and yet there are so many who prefer the shady side of Pall-mall!

"Odd, isn't it," says Herman, reflecting upon this fact, "that men can turn their backs upon Nature without a sigh, to shut themselves in houses like packing-cases, and tramp stony pavements, and breathe sewer-gas—and like it? What gregarious animals we must be. that a crowd is so attractive to us! A curious indication of how small a world we possess in ourselves individually. Such men as Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge could afford to inhabit solitudes; their crowd was within—their minds were peopled with thoughts and fancies and vivid dreams that were better company than men and women."

"You speak as if you did not care for the country."

"I care for it intensely—as a picture; but I doubt my capacity for being happy out of a great city. The press and conflict of life are a necessity of my being. I admire your fine old Priory and its gardens—full of such a tender smiling peace; I wonder at your tranquil even days, as at a fable of some enchanted isle—like Prospero's without Caliban."

They talk of many things. All too soon it is eight o'clock—a quarter past—twenty minutes past—and they must go down to the valley where Dewrance is to assemble his forces.

Mr. Petherick has driven Miss Morcombe and his nieces in his pony-carriage—a commodious rather than elegant vehicle, which carries any number, and would move a houseful of furniture at a push. He is to drive them back through the moonlit lanes, while Mr. Dewrance's party wander over the grassy hill and by the mysterious path above the mountain gorge—where the fairies might hold high festivals on such nights as these, if earth had not grown too old for them.

The Incumbent of Lochwithian has enjoyed himself amazingly, and in the fulness of his heart is bent upon making some return of hospitality to the Curate, and the Curate's clerical friend, Mr. Milner.

"Come and lunch with me to-morrow," he says expansively. "We won't call it dinner, for that means ceremony, and mine is only a bachelor's box. You'll come with them, Mr. Westray, I hope?"

"I had serious thoughts of going back to London to-morrow," replies Herman; "but I can't resist such a tempting invitation."

He has a vague idea that in lunching with Mr. Petherick he will have some chance of seeing Editha once more, before he goes back to that world of action and strife which knows her not.

He has the privilege of handing her into the pony-carriage, adjusting her wraps—for her dress is thin and the night-dews falling. They shake hands, and the pony trots away with his load at a complacent jig-jog pace; and Herman feels that the night and the landscape have lost a charm.

He is more thoughtful than ever throughout the homeward walk. The scene is mysteriously lovely in the moonlight—conducive to waking dreams.

"I think I ought to pack my portmanteau," he says to himself, as they enter the avenue of the Cambria—black as Erebus, save for a shaft of moonshine darting through the pine-tops here and there. "I feel curiously like falling in love. But then I've taken the disease so often, and found myself so little the worse for it when it was over."

He does not pack his portmanteau to-night.

CHAPTER IV.

"Wenn zwei von einander scheiden,
So geben sie sich die Händ',
Und fangen an zu weinen,
Und seufzen ohne End'.

Wir haben nicht geweinet,
Wir seufzten nicht 'Weh!' und 'Ach!'
Die Thränen und die Seufzer,
Die kamen hintennach."

MR. PETHERICK'S bachelor box—a temporary abode which he occupies pending the erection of a vicarage on the prettiest bit of his thirty acres of glebe—is as cosy a habitation as one would desire to find in a day's journey. It is about half a mile from the village of Lochwithian, sheltered on every side by towering peak or broad green slope with wooded fringe. Rather inconvenient internally, perhaps, looked at from the utilitarian point

of view, as the bedrooms have evidently been a subject of minor importance in the builder's plan, and the staircase an unconsidered trifle. There are two snug sitting-rooms, however, a neat little doll's-house kitchen, bow-windows opening upon a velvet lawn, and a shrubbery of choicest conifers, on which a previous incumbent has spent his substance and his care.

Mr. Petherick's idea of a rough-and-ready luncheon is by no means discouraging. A big bowl of roses beautifies the centre of the table. Snowy damask, quaint old Swansea china, heavy diamond cut-glass, a forequarter of lamb, a ham, a pair of fowls, a silvery slab of salmon garnished with cucumber, a salad, and a few kickshaws of confectionery, form no uninviting picture. Herefordshire cider, sherry, and claret are the accompaniments of the meal.

The gentlemen have walked over from Llandrysak, and bring appetites sharpened by the clear mountain air. There is much conversation, chiefly of matters ecclesiastical or university reminiscences, to which Herman listens, or in which he joins with a mild interest. His attention is keener presently, when his host begins to talk of Editha.

"Yes, she is a lovely girl," says Mr. Petherick, in reply to an observation of Mr. Milner's; "lovely in the best sense of the word. I have watched her growth as one watches some beautiful flower. I never knew any one in whom thoughtfulness for others was so spontaneous a quality. If I could only see her married to the man of my choice I should be happy, for then I should know Lochwithian would not lose her."

"The man of your choice is a local power, I conclude?" remarks Herman frigidly, as if this observation of the Vicar's were in some measure an affront.

"Yes; Vivian Hetheridge has one of the finest estates in the county, and is a generous-hearted, right-minded young fellow into the bargain."

"Young, a landowner, right-minded, and no doubt good-looking," says Herman; "strange that a lady should be indifferent to so much excellence! At the West-end of London, now, Mr. Hetheridge would be—like popular securities on the Stock Exchange—inquired for."

Mr. Petherick does not pursue the subject; but that image of a wealthy and agreeable suitor dwells curiously in Herman's mind. He is speculating upon Mr. Hetheridge's virtues and Mr. Hetheridge's chances as the gentlemen stroll round the Vicar's garden, and admire the Vicar's poultry, which have free warren under the ornamental timber on the lawn.

Mr. Milner asks to see Lochwithian Church, whereat Herman

brightens visibly. The church is so near the Priory, and there is just the possibility of their meeting Miss Morcombe.

"Yes, you really should see the church," he exclaims; "it is a gem."

Mr. Petherick opens the garden gate; they cross a meadow and find themselves at the foot of the great green hill which shelters that placid vale, where the monks of old made their home.

Much as he admires the church, Mr. Westray does not care about seeing it again. He stays outside with Dewrance—stays in sight of the Priory windows, which look down upon them from above the shrubberied bank.

"I shall go back to London to-morrow," says Herman.

"You have been threatening me with that calamity for the last ten days. Do you mean to-morrow in a rigid actual sense, or the Shakespearian to-morrow, which 'creeps on with petty pace from day to day,' and is never overtaken by man?"

"No, I really must go back. I don't get on with my work in these peaceful solitudes. Odd, isn't it? I miss my own particular chair, my books of reference."

"I understand. You can't write a comedy without Scribe and Benedix at your elbow."

"My comedy has not progressed. However, I have gained what I wanted—health; and I have reason to be grateful to Llandrysak. Do you know this Mr. Hetheridge whom the Vicar talks of?"

"Yes, I have met him. A very good fellow."

"And attached to Miss Morcombe?"

"Positively adores her; carries the evidence of his hopeless condition upon him, visible to the naked eye."

"And will end by winning her, no doubt. The eternal fitness of things is in his favour."

The Curate shakes his head sagely.

"Editha Morcombe is not a girl to be governed by worldly considerations," he says.

"But her education, her surroundings, her own bent of mind—all fit her to be a country-gentleman's wife. No other union could be so in harmony with her character. She would never make a woman of fashion or a woman of the world; nor is she adapted to mate with a struggler who has to force his way in life. A rural parish is her natural sphere."

"Assuredly," answers Dewrance. "Your critical mind has arrived at a just estimate of her disposition."

Horses' hoofs sound near them, gently walking down the hill. Herman and the Curate look up from their station by the church-

yard-gate, and survey the equestrians—a lady on a chestnut horse, riding between a middle-aged gentleman on a deep-chested, weight-carrying brown cob, and a gentleman on a showy bay.

The middle-aged gentleman is Squire Morcombe, and the lady is Editha. The gentleman on the bay is young, fresh-coloured, good-looking, clad in gray homespun, and stoutly booted. He carries a hunting-crop, and has the air of being more at home on horseback than elsewhere.

"That's young Hetheridge," says Mr. Dewrance.

"A sweetly commonplace young man, with that vacuous expression which friendly souls call an open countenance," replies Herman critically.

Editha and her father see the gentlemen at the gate, and ride up to them. There is shaking of hands and friendly greeting.

"Come in and have tea," says the Squire in his hearty way. "Dewrance, you've met Hetheridge. Mr. Westray, Mr. Hetheridge." And then, bringing himself alongside the bay, "You must have heard of Westray—literary man—writes books, you know, and what not. Very nice fellow."

Vivian Hetheridge has saluted the stranger stiffly. He is in that stage of fatuity in which a man sees a rival and an enemy in every other man; and he has heard Editha talk of this Westray with a too evident interest.

They ride slowly up to the porch; Herman walking at Editha's side, and taking no more notice of Mr. Hetheridge than if that landed esquire had been a groom. Dewrance stays behind to bring the two elder Churchmen.

"We always have afternoon tea in my sister's room," says Editha, as she and Herman go into the hall. "You will not mind?"

"Mind? I should like it of all things. I want to talk to your sister about her painting."

Editha leads the way to that pretty sitting-room on the upper floor, Herman and Hetheridge following. The latter is quite at home, and is welcomed warmly by Ruth, who greets Herman courteously, but not effusively.

"I thought you had forgotten us all, Vivian," she says; "it is so long since we have seen you."

"I have been away for a fortnight. I'm so glad you missed me—a little."

"You may call it very much, if you like."

"And Editha"—with a glance at the young lady in the riding-habit, who has lingered for a minute or so to rearrange the flowers on the pretty oval tea-table before running away to

change her dress—"she never misses any one. Too busy, I suppose."

"I didn't know you were away," replies Editha naïvely. "I hope you enjoyed yourself."

"O yes. Tenby, to a man who goes there twice a year, is distractingly gay. I had the charge of my mother and sisters, and was there on duty."

Editha runs off to dress, leaving Herman seated by Miss Morcombe's sofa. He begins to talk of that copy of Vandyke in the vestry, and of art in general, whereupon Ruth forgets her prejudices and vague apprehensions, and is at once interested. So few people who understand art ever come to Lochwithian Priory.

"You know some of the Academicians?" she inquires wonderingly, upon Herman's familiar mention of a great name.

"Yes, I know most of them."

"It must be wonderful to live in the midst of such people," she says, with brightening eyes; "to hear of famous pictures before they are painted; to know all about great books before they are published; to live in the front rank of intellectual progress instead of being quite outside the literary and artistic world as we are here."

"Yes," says Herman, with his languid air, "I am inclined to agree with the Laureate about the relative values of life in the wilderness and life in the city. And yet we metropolitans are poor creatures compared with the children of the mountain and the flood. Look at your friend Mr. Hetheridge, for instance"—with a glance at Vivian, who stands by the farther window poking his finger listlessly between the bars of the little aviary. "What a magnificent animal! Fresh clear eye, deep chest, straight legs—sound in wind and limb. Intellectual London does not produce that kind of thing."

"Mr. Hetheridge's physical superiority is his smallest claim to your admiration," replies Ruth haughtily. "Of all who have ever admired or wooed Editha, Vivian is Ruth's favourite."

"No doubt. Men are like horses, and where form is faultless one hardly expects to find vice. And destiny has placed Mr. Hetheridge in a groove from which a man can hardly get askew. Life is no problem to a country squire. Its lines are laid down for him—to be a good son, a faithful husband, a judicious father, a kind master, a liberal landlord, a mild Conservative, with a dash of Liberalism to season his speeches at public dinners and Eisteddfods; to feed the hungry and clothe the naked—at Christmas time, and to entertain his own class hospitably all the year round; to go to church on Sunday mornings, and ask the vicarage people

to all his dinner parties. What more can Heaven or man demand from the lord of the soil?"

Editha reappears, fresh and blooming, in her simple dinner-dress of gray silk, with ruffles of old Brussels lace at the throat and wrists. The two parsons follow a minute later, and their party being now complete—for the Squire despises feminine tea-fights—they all sit down, a merry circle enough—Mr. Hetheridge being brightened wonderfully at Editha's return.

He sits next her, and helps in the management of the old-fashioned silver kettle, and attends to the spirit-lamp. He carries Ruth's teacup to the little table by the sofa, and makes himself generally useful. The whole business of the tea-table appears delightful to him, and he has an air of schoolboy happiness essentially irritating to Herman Westray.

That gentleman manages to enjoy himself notwithstanding. He is gayer than Dewrance has ever seen him; and he and Mr. Milner have the lion's share of the conversation, and afford amusement to the whole party. Squire Hetheridge sits silent when he has nothing to occupy him about teacups or kettle, and watches and listens, wondering-eyed, marvelling how any two men can have so much to say as these two, whose words jostle each other, whose promptness of repartee seems, to his simple mind, equal to anything he has read or heard of world-renowned jesters.

It is half-past six, when the simple meal is finished; and Dewrance reminds his friend that the dogcart is waiting for them at the parsonage.

"And you really leave Llandrysak to-morrow?" Editha asks, as she and Herman shake hands, with ever so faint a tone of regret.

"Really. I have been obliged to make it a positive engagement with myself—a point of honour as it were, like having a tooth extracted, or paying one's losses on the Derby—or I doubt if I could have nerved myself for the wrench."

"You like the scenery so much?"

"I am absolutely astonished at my own capacity for admiring the beauties of Nature. I should not have supposed that hills and valleys could have so endeared themselves to me."

"I am afraid you are not quite in earnest."

"I am only too much in earnest."

They are going down the wide old staircase side by side, the others preceding them, and her hand hangs so near him that he longs to clasp it in his own—he feels his fingers drawn towards hers, as if by magnetic attraction.

"You read German?" he asks abruptly.

"Yes," with an inflection indicative of surprise.

"Then you know all about the elective affinities?"

"That's some idea of Goethe's, isn't it? I have only read one of his novels. I like Schiller so much better."

"A feminine mistake; women read *Werther*, and think that is the beginning and end of Goethe."

They have lingered on the wide square landing, lighted dimly by a stained-glass window.

"Are you coming, Westray?" shouts Dewrance below.

"Directly," answers Herman impatiently. "I should so like to talk to you of German literature," he continues. "How I wish there were any chance of your being in town next spring!"

Editha smiles.

"It is not the most improbable thing in the world. There is a scheme for a loop line from Pen-y-craig to Lochwithian. I believe papa is going up to London to attend committees and deputations, and I don't exactly know what. He has promised that if he goes he will take me."

"And will you promise, on your part, that if you do come you will persuade Mr. Morcombe to call upon me? I know most of the newspaper people, and might be of some use to him."

"I am sure papa will be very glad to see you again."

"Are you coming?" in despairing appeal from Dewrance.

"One would suppose that dogcart were an express train. Good-bye, Miss Morcombe."

They shake hands, lingeringly on Herman's part, and he runs down-stairs, Editha remaining on the landing, leaning against one of the heraldic lions. His last upward glance shows him the calm fair face, with its frame of dark hair and fresh youthful bloom.

Mr. Morcombe promises to call at Herman's chambers in the spring, or perhaps even as early as February, as the railroad people are anxious to get their bill without delay. And thus Herman Westray leaves Lochwithian, not altogether without hope of meeting the serious-minded young lady again.

"Why did you ask the Squire to call upon you?" growls Dewrance, with a discontented air, as they walk across the meadow, the two elder clerics in advance, discoursing profoundly upon glebe. "You say that Editha Morcombe is no wife for a man of your stamp?"

"Who talked of wives? I merely wish to be commonly civil when the Squire comes to London."

"Commonly civil," echoes Dewrance; "I've seen curious results come of common civility in my time."

They go back to Mr. Petherick's bachelor's box; and being pressed thereto by the hospitable parson, smoke cigars and drink

mild infusions of whiskey-and-soda-water for an hour or two, and then drive back to Llandrysak in the glow and glory of sunset, which has melted into moonlight before they arrive at the Cambria.

CHAPTER V.

“A year divides us, love from love,
Though you love now, though I loved then
The gulf is strait, but deep enough;
Who shall recross, who among men
Shall cross again?”

AN autumnal evening; soft, gray, and misty in the country; thick, smoky, damp, and disagreeable in town. The last night of October, and the first night of Herman Westray's new and original comedy, *Hemlock*; the opening night of Mrs. Brandreth's brand-new theatre, the *Frivolity*—altogether a great night in the dramatic world.

For the last week or so the critics, and those outside enthusiasts who make it their business to know all about the inside workings of their favourite theatres, have been discussing Mrs. Brandreth's future. She is young, handsome, popular, and almost universally admired. Of course there are those unpleasant people, the judicious few, who think her art a shade too artificial, her beauty somewhat too sharply accentuated by those extravagances of toilette which astonish and delight the multitude. But, on the whole, Myra Brandreth is a favourite with the play-going public, and it is a matter to be counted upon that the *Frivolity* stalls will fill nightly, and the *Frivolity* private boxes—such cozy little nests of velvet and satin—will go off briskly at Mr. Mitchell's. The new theatre has been discussed at West-end dinner tables, with that amiable assumption of knowledge and unconscious ignorance which distinguish the dramatic Sir Oracle. The salaries Mrs. Brandreth is to pay her company, the cost of the decorations, the terms Mr. Westray is to receive for his play, have been stated with an exactness which passes current for accuracy.

And now the all-important night has arrived, and at a quarter before eight the dainty little theatre is packed as closely as if it were indeed a bon-bon box filled with chocolats pralinés and chocolats à la crème. The critics are there in full phalanx, some of them with handsome wives at their elbows, to assist them in forming their opinions, or at least to expound the merits of Mrs. Brandreth's dresses. All these critical gentlemen display a lively interest in the event of the night, and have such a good-natured air that it is hard to believe that gall may flow from their pens instead of honey.

The general public is here in full force, having paid its money, eager for the favourite's triumph; but that particular public of literature and art, which in many cases has not paid for admittance, is the most noticeable. These the general public point out to each other, and whisper about, while the band plods resolutely through a set of German waltzes, to which nobody thinks of listening.

The private boxes are all occupied; pretty faces, bright dresses, line the theatre. It has been so artfully designed that the gallery, though a fair place for seeing from, is almost invisible to the parterre and boxes, being, as it were, effaced by a dome of gilded lattice, the most noticeable feature in the house, which screens the sun-burner and tempers its effulgence. Above this perforated dome there are large sky-lights which open to the cool night; so that in warm and fine weather the Frivolity may be made almost an open-air theatre.

The one private box which is not well filled is the stage-box on the left of the proscenium. Here sits a gentleman in solitary state—a gentleman of about five-and-thirty—in faultless evening dress. His hair, moustache, and whiskers are of that nondescript colour which it would be flattery to call brown, mockery to describe as auburn; they are of the hue of a well-preserved hay-rick, but are made the most of by the barber's art, and are evidently not unvalued by their owner. The general expression of the gentleman's face is weary to vacuousness. His dull gray eye surveys the house, but no warmth is communicated to it by the enthusiasm evident in that expectant crowd.

"There's Earlswood in that stage-box," says Jack Pollintory of the *Highflyer* to Dick Savage of the *Chameleon*; "I wonder how he feels now that the builder's bill has come in?"

"Pshaw! a howling swell like that thinks no more of paying for a theatre than you would of settling for a Greenwich dinner. He has more coal-mines than I have boots."

Opera-glasses are directed to the solitary gentleman by this time. It is generally known that he is Lord Earlswood, and it is

known to the esoteric few that Lord Earlswood's money is to pay for the building of the Frivolity. Of course Mrs. Brandreth has taken the theatre in good faith, and will pay her rent, two thousand five hundred per annum, as punctually as quarter-day comes round, and will stand or fall by her venture; but it is known that the actual erection of the theatre is Lord Earlswood's affair. The straw-coloured quilted satin; the amethyst velvet cushions, chair covers, curtains; the medallion portraits of Juliet, Cordelia, Desdemona, Rosalind, Perdita, Beatrice, Katherine, painted by Academicians; the crystal girandoles with clusters of parian candles, in which a slender gastube is artfully inserted; the cloak-rooms, with their luxurious appliances; the smoking divan, opening upon a wide stone balcony, overhanging the street, where the smokers may sit on warm nights—these, and a hundred other details, Lord Earlswood must pay for; and the British public uses its lorgnettes freely, and regards him with a kind of interest, on account of his risk; just as on the turf, the same public is interested in the man who is known to speculate deeply.

There has been an airy trifle in the way of burletta to play the audience in—pretty girls with fresh young voices, well-dressed, well-bred young men, and sparkling French music; but now the serious interest, the vital business of the night, is to begin with Herman's comedy.

Hemlock, a classical comedy, suggested by Emile Augier. "Suggested is a good word," says Mr. Skalper, in the stalls, to his friend Mr. Phalyer. "Of course we know what it is, *La Ciguë* done into modern slang."

Behind the scenes the excitement is feverous, breathless, but not noisy; sound and fury are not to be allowed in Myra Brandreth's theatre. The scene-painter soothes his ruffled nerves with a cigar, in the dim solitude of his painting-room in the flies, and wonders whether those Pompeian scenes which he has laboured at with so much care will hit that uncertain mark—the public taste. In the wardrobe, a bare and uninviting apartment, also in the region of the flies, and opening upon the gutter and parapet of the building, Mrs. Lockstitch, the costume-maker, and her pale-faced minions are sewing the last bit of gold lace on the last of the ballet-dresses, while the damsel who is to wear that classic garment waits anxiously in the dressing-room below, scantily clad in tight-fitting pink hose, and solacing herself with half-a-pint of porter and a ham-sandwich. This opening night of the theatre is an occasion on which even an honest little ballet-girl, living on her own salary and helping a mother to live withal, may rush into the extravagance of an 'am-sandwich.

But excitement the most intense, because the most suppressed, reigns in Myra Brandreth's dressing-room, that exquisite apartment which focuses in one small centre the costliness and taste of the whole building. Lord Earlswood has said to the architect, "Let the manageress's dressing-room be as perfect as art can make it. Simply that; anything less than that, and I shall consider the house a failure."

The architect has obeyed according to his lights. Pompadour, in the plenitude of her power, with France at her feet, acknowledged protectress of the arts, may have had rooms as elegant, but not more elegant or more costly. Walls upholstered in sky-blue satin embroidered with butterflies and birds—birds and butterflies so artistic that they seem living creatures fluttering in a tropical sky; doors veneered with ivory, mantelpiece of Sèvres, ceiling painted with more birds and butterflies, chairs and couches of white enamelled wood and quilted blue satin, toilet-table, the crowning wonder of all, entirely of ivory and silver. There is not an inch of velvet or gilding in the room. All is cool, soft, reposeful. After the brightness and glitter of the theatre, the eye rests here as on a glimpse of dark-blue water.

Myra Brandreth stands before the cheval-glass, dressed for her part. The long straight robe of white cashmere, like Vivien's sea-green samite, rather expresses than hides her slender figure; each round slim arm is clasped with a golden serpent, and a golden serpent binds her chestnut hair. These are her sole ornaments.

In an easy-chair by the fireplace sits Herman Westray, who has just been admitted to an audience, being altogether a privileged person this evening. He sees the room to-night for the first time, and has been warm in his commendation.

"The Queen of Sheba could have had nothing better," he says.

Mrs. Brandreth shrugs her slim shoulders with a deprecating air.

"How much more useful the money this room cost would have been in Consols!" she replies.

"No doubt; but a man of Earlswood's stamp likes spending money, not giving it away. This room will be talked about by the clubs. A few thousands invested in your name would bring him no renown, though the gift of such a sum might be only an appropriate tribute to your genius."

Myra's dark eyes flash upon him angrily for a moment, and then grow grave even to gloom.

"I suppose *I* shall be talked of at the clubs as well as the theatre," she says moodily, looking down, as she arranges the folds of her cashmere drapery.

"That goes without saying. You did not expect to escape when you allowed Earlswood to build a theatre for you?"

"Lord Earlswood built this house as a speculation."

"No doubt—as a speculation."

"It was not my fault that he squandered thousands upon this foolish room. I told him that all I wanted was space and ventilation, and to be tolerably near the stage. I must do him the justice to say that his answer was that of a gentleman. 'You are to pay me rent for the theatre,' he said. 'That is a matter of business, and I shall gladly accept any suggestions you may make; but your dressing-room is to be a present from me to you, and you must allow me to gratify my own taste.'"

"Very nice of his lordship. The dressing-room is a capital advertisement for the theatre. I don't think you need grumble about it. And now, honestly, do you feel that you are going to make a success?"

"I feel as if I were going to break down. My head is burning, and my hands are like ice."

She gives him her small thin hand, stone cold and trembling.

"You'll do," he answers decisively. "The piece will be a hit."

He knows that with her highly-strung nature she is sure to be greatest when she suffers most.

"Keep yourself quiet," he says kindly. "I shall go round to the stalls, and not stir till the curtain drops. I have not the faintest fear of the result."

"Say one kind word to me, Herman, before you go," she pleads, with tenderest saddest beseechment in her tones.

He comes to her slowly, takes the small smoothly-braided head between his hands, and kisses her forehead. So might brother or father have kissed her in some solemn crisis of her life. He is so utterly an artist that this hazard of success or non-success to-night seems to him a solemn crisis.

"God bless you, Myra! Be sure of triumph; I see the forecast of it shining in your eyes. Let my play succeed, and Earlswood's speculation—fail."

That earnest look of his, straight into the bright dark eyes, explains the hidden significance of his speech. When he is gone, Myra Brandreth looks round the room with a slow deliberate survey, scornful almost to loathing.

"Does he think I am to be bought with ivory and Sèvres?" she asks.

CHAPTER VI.

"Hélas ! l'amour sans lendemain ni veille
Fut-il jamais ?"

HERMAN is in his place just in time to see the curtain rise on a scene as perfect as any which our realistic and artistic modern stage has ever offered to the public. It is an interior in Pompeii, elaborate, exquisite in its details as a picture by Alma Tadema. The foreground represents the triclinium, or dining-room, divided by marble columns from the peristyle, where a silvery spray flies upwards amidst the gloom of oleander and olive. Through the open roof of that inner court shines the calm summer moon. Three men, reclining on their narrow couches around a central table laden with fruits and flowers and tapering wine flasks, occupy the stage, one young, with curled locks, crowned with a rose-garland. Slaves are in attendance ; flute-players, dancing-girls fill the background ; but as the scene progresses these melt away. Leander, a rich young patrician, being weary of life and its beaten round of pleasures, has determined to make a sudden end of a brief bright existence with a draught of hemlock. He announces his resolution to his two parasites, middle-aged profligates, who have been the instruments of his corruption. He frankly expresses his contempt for both these sycophants, one a drunkard the other a miser, but tells them that he is going to leave his wealth to one or other of them, upon a certain condition. He has purchased a lovely slave from Cyprus, and his fortune shall be bestowed upon that one of his flatterers whom the fair captive favours with her preference.

The two friends are by no means charmed by the idea of this encounter ; but Leander tells them that, having no real friendship for one or the other, he saves himself the embarrassment of choosing his heir by letting some one else make the election. The friends at first indignantly decline the contest, assume a noble scorn, and forego all hope of Leander's wealth rather than stoop to sue for a girl's favour, which both feel doubtful of conciliating ; but being left to themselves, prudence comes to the rescue, and they determine to hazard the trial, each entertaining the lowest estimate of the other's merits. Leander returns, and hears that their honourable scruples have evaporated.

And now the slave appears in her white robes, with the golden serpents on her wrists, pale, beautiful, with those great dark eyes of hers, which flash swiftly round the house in one brief survey

of the audience. She is a captive, ravished by a crew of pirates from the bright shore where she wandered gaily a little while ago! a maiden of noble birth, reft from home and kindred. It scarcely needs that she should tell this, in a brief impassioned speech, to her new lord, Myra Brandreth's look and bearing being so entirely noble. Leander is touched by her beauty and sorrow, receives her gently, tenderly even, assures her that no wrong shall be done her. He beseeches her, in order to decide a wager, to declare which of his two friends shall have rendered himself the most agreeable to her in an hour's conversation.

Then follows a scene in which the two sycophants display the graces of their mind in delicate flatteries addressed to Helena the slave; but presently, losing temper in the keen sense of rivalry and the magnitude of the stake, fall foul of each other in a round of abuse, and end by fisticuffs. Helena rushes out to seek some one to part them, and Leander appears while they are fighting, and laughs with cynical delight at the realisation of his intention. His heritage has made them foes already. He has the pleasure of seeing the vultures fighting for his carcass before his death.

From this point Herman's piece diverges from Augier's graceful comedy. Leander, who professes to have proved the hollowness of life and the worthlessness of love, to be weary to satiety of pleasure and beauty, is touched by Helena's modest loveliness and noble mind; and before he is aware, his heart is taken captive by his prisoner. Herman makes the love-scenes more important than they are in the original; he strengthens the character of Helena, deepens the sentimental interest to intensity. At the last, when the appointed hour strikes, and the fatal cup is at Leander's lips, the passionate cry, "I love you!" breaks from the slave. The audience is moved as with one mind, and a burst of enthusiastic applause proclaims the triumph of actress and author.

Herman has rendered Augier's gracious rhyme into blank verse; vigorous, fanciful, poetical, full of repartee and sudden turns of thought; modern allusions thinly veiled by their classic dress, keen touches of irony that charm an enlightened audience. The curtain falls amidst a storm of applause. The pit, always foremost in the appreciation of an intellectual treat, rises in its enthusiasm as Frederick Selwyn, the Leander, leads Myra Brandreth before the curtain. Bouquets shoot, rocket-like, through the air, whence none can discover, but seemingly from the latticed gallery that runs round the upper circle. After the actors and scene-painter have been called, some friendly soul remembers the author, and Mr. Westray is loudly demanded. Herman goes

round to Lord Earlswood's box, whence he honours the British public with a languid and somewhat supercilious bow.

"Do you think it's a success?" asks his lordship, with the air of a man who rarely trusts himself to arrive at an opinion single-handed.

"They're making a good deal of noise," answers Herman languidly—he is always languid with Lord Earlswood—"but that's apt to be fallacious. I believe, as a rule, the pieces that seem doubtful on first nights pay best in the long run."

"Brandreth was magnificent," says the landlord of the Frivolity. "I daresay the play is very clever from a literary standpoint, but, as a matter of personal taste, I should have preferred opéra bouffe, or a modern drama, with Brandreth poisoning herself in a riding-habit, and rolling about the floor. I saw that done somewhere last year, and it took immensely. H'wever, she was great in your last scene."

"Mrs. Brandreth's acting was simply superb throughout," replies Herman, with a tone of respect so pointed as to be a reproof. Lord Earlswood is, however, not accessible to such delicate correction.

"Yes," he drawls, "Brandreth is a first-rate all-round actress; but I think this piece of yours shoots over the heads of your audience. One's obliged to keep one's mind on the stretch in order to understand it."

"That depends upon the size of one's mind," answers Herman coolly; "small minds naturally require stretching."

"Haw!" exclaims his lordship, with a laugh like a single knock—loud, startling, monosyllabic; "that's not bad. Shall we go round and see Brandreth?"

"Certainly. I must lose no time in acknowledging my obligations to her."

There is a neat little green-baize door just outside Lord Earlswood's box, which opens on to the prompt side of the stage. His lordship made this door an essential feature in the architect's plan, and stipulated for a private key of the same, and the box adjacent thereto, before he signed the lease which has made Mrs. Brandreth actual mistress of the theatre. He uses his key to-night with a sidelong glance of triumph at Herman; but although Herman has been admitted to the manageress's dressing-room, Lord Earlswood dare go no farther than the greenroom.

It is a pretty little room, with a large looking-glass reaching from floor to ceiling at one end, in which the actors and actresses may survey their toilettes and themselves. A low chintz covered divan runs round the rest of the room; lithographed portraits of French and English actors adorn the walls; a majolica jardinière

in the centre is filled with Mrs. Brandreth's bouquets—floral tributes, which she has left there in disdainful carelessness.

A door opens from the greenroom to the manageress's dressing-room, and the greenroom is within a step or two of the prompt entrance. The rest of the performers are accommodated in upper chambers, on a level with the gallery, and agreeably warmed by the heated air ascending from the lower part of the house.

"Never mind ; perhaps when we go to heaven we shall all be manageress, and have ivory toilette-tables," says Bella Walters, the little burlesque actress, as she stands before her two-and-six-penny looking-glass, dabbing a final coat of prepared chalk upon her pert little nose, while old Mrs. Humpsby, the dresser, grins approvingly.

Mrs. Brandreth is dressing ; so the two gentlemen wait, and stare at the people dressed for the burlesque, who run in to scrutinise their new costumes in the big mirror : girl cavaliers in satin trunks and satin boots, low comedians with false noses of cotton-wool, mythological, fairylandish, and so on.

"What a lot of people !" cries Lord Earlswood. "I'm afraid it's an expensive company."

"I shouldn't wonder if it were," answers Herman dryly.

It seems to him that this theatre is the most costly toy that ever a man made for himself. It has cost Myra Brandreth her reputation already, and has associated her name with Lord Earlswood's to the end of time, or at least to the end of the time we live in, which is pretty much the same thing. When a man has been dead as long as Homer, it must be of small consequence what the world thinks of him.

The two gentlemen wait for a time that seems long to both ; but at last the door opens, and Mrs. Brandreth appears in a dark-green cloth dress, made as neatly and as plainly as a riding-habit, and with a sealskin jacket hanging across her arm. A small sealskin hat crowns her dark hair ; not a feather, not an ornament is visible. She wears a linen collar, linen cuffs, gloves the colour of her dress. Mrs. Brandreth has too much taste to trail elaborately-trimmed silks or velvets about the side-scenes of a theatre.

"That's a capital cross-country get-up, Mrs. Brandreth," says Lord Earlswood approvingly. "Allow me to congratulate you on your performance. It must have surprised your greatest admirers."

"Thanks. I'm glad you were pleased," with the briefest glance and smile ; and then, turning to Herman, she asks earnestly, "Were you satisfied ?"

"You have made my piece," he answers warmly.

"I never acted in a play of yours before—think of that !"

"And I never had a character of mine so interpreted. You breathed a soul into my mould of clay."

She gives him a look which glorifies her pale face—very pale after the excitement of the evening—a look which arouses as much jealousy in Lord Earlswood as that gentleman's limited capacity for passion or suffering will allow. He is of a somewhat lukewarm temperament by nature, cooled down almost to freezing-point by education. But he thinks it would be a rather nice thing for Myra Brandreth to be something more to him than a popular actress, and he pursues her with as much energy as he is capable of infusing into any action of his life. This building a theatre for her has been the gratification of his last fancy, and has served to occupy that scantily-furnished chamber which he calls his mind. He has a great deal of money, and finds his chief enjoyment in getting rid of it. He has built yachts and kept racehorses—and the only novel amusement left for him has been to build a theatre.

There is a good deal said about the play and the house, the effect of the decorations with a full auditorium, and Mr. Pipp the architect is praised for his perforated Moorish dome.

"Makes the theatre look like a parrot-cage," says Lord Earlswood, who imitates Horace in his incapacity for admiration, "but it's rather a nice idea, I daresay. Jokes—fellow who wrote about the house in the *Builder*—said it was good, and a builder-fellow ought to understand that kind of thing."

"We shall call a rehearsal for twelve o'clock on Monday," Mrs. Brandreth says, turning to Herman. "If there is any alteration you would like—"

"There is none; or at least none that would touch your part. Your acting was simply perfect, and the other characters were very good. I think we might apply the pruning-knife judiciously to some of the dialogue—when you are off the stage."

"You will come on Monday, then?"

"Certainly."

"Good-night, Lord Earlswood," says his lordship's tenant, with a certain careless graciousness not altogether flattering to Algeron, Baron Earlswood.

"Going away so soon?" he exclaims.

"It is nearly eleven, and I am rather tired. Good-night, Mr. Westray."

She shakes hands with both gentlemen languidly, and both accompany her to her carriage, which is waiting at the stage-door. It is the neatest and quietest of broughams, the coachman middle-aged, puritanical in the simplicity of his dark-blue overcoat.

"If you could call on me to-morrow," says Mrs. Brandreth, as an afterthought, "we might go through the piece together and make what alterations you like in the dialogue. It would save time at Monday's rehearsal."

"No doubt; but I regret to say Sunday is a busy day with me just now. I shall be occupied all to-morrow."

"What would your dear father have said if he had heard of your working on a Sunday?" remarks Mrs. Brandreth reproachfully.

"Unhappily the world I belong to just now is very different from my father's world."

"Just now! That sounds as if you had some notion of withdrawing from your present life and its surroundings."

"I confess to a vague hope of being some day something better than an ephemeral scribbler, with a demoniacal printer's boy always haunting me as affectionately as the Bottle-imp. Good-night."

"Good-night."

And so they part, and Myra Brandreth sinks wearily into a corner of the snug little brougham, and thinks that, notwithstanding her dainty bonbon-box of a theatre, with a landlord ready to be ridiculously lenient as a creditor, despite her triumph of to-night, it is a hard world somehow.

There is one man whose good word she values—whose praise brings maidenly blushes to her matron cheek; for whose honest unalterable love she would barter all she has ever won of prosperity or renown—all praises that have ever been given her by all the world beside—and she thinks drearily to-night that of all hopeless dreams that ever woman dreamed, her dream of winning his heart is the vainest.

"It was mine once," she tells herself; "that's what makes it so hard to know it can never be mine again. Mine to hold or throw away when he was younger and better than he is now, but obscure and unpraised; lost to me now that all the world praises him—now, when I could be so proud of him, work for him so honestly, cleave to him so faithfully through every change of fortune, love him best of all when the world grew weary of him, and fame went out like the flame of a candle."

As in a picture she sees one bright moment of her past; a green lane in summer time; the sultry breathless heat of late summer; a steep grassy bank on which the harts-tongue grows tall; and two figures, her own and Herman's, standing with hand clasped in hand, her head upon his shoulder, her eyes looking up at him proudly, fondly as a girl's eyes turn to her first lover; but that picture is nearly ten years old, and Myra Brandreth's

thoughts and feelings have gone through many a change within the compass of those years.

"How bitterly true French proverbs are!" she thinks. "*On revient toujours*—And I am as weak as the rest, and lament the treasure I cast away, and have changed my standard of value, and that which I counted gold now loathe as basest dross."

CHAPTER VII.

"And now the time is wintery,
The first love fades too; none will see,
When April warms the world anew,
The place wherein love grew."

TEN years ago—earth younger and fresher by ten years; so much the more of blossoming wilderness in the southern hemisphere where the emigrant and the squatter has yet to set the print of his civilising sole; so many the more fair and pleasant places in fair and pleasant England which the speculative builder, with his dust and his bricks and his lime and mortar, has yet to disfigure. The world brighter and younger by a decade. Great men still living who now are dust; dear names still sounding in the current talk of life which are now written in epitaphs and remembered as household words; and Myra Clitheroe is a tall slip of a girl, just over her seventeenth birthday—birthday at which there has been an innocent little tea-drinking in Colonel Clitheroe's cottage, whereto the young people from the Rectory have been bidden.

Colonel Clitheroe is one of those adventurous spirits who, in the decline of their days, are apt to seek the repose of remote and tranquil villages, where the requirements of life are narrowed by the simple manners of the inhabitants, where beef and mutton, and milk and butter, and eggs and poultry are cheap, and house-rent low, and air purest ether, and sky unstained by the smoke of factory chimneys, and the village a quaint little cluster of low-roofed cottages embowered in greenery, and pigs, pigeons, and fowls in full possession of the High-street, and the post-office and general-shop an institution to be wondered at, so comprehensive and universal are its contents.

The Colonel is a man who has seen much of life. He has fought for Don Carlos, and derives his military title from his service in Spain. He has lived in Paris, Madrid, and London; has spent some portion of his days in South America, and is not unremembered in Mexico. But at sixty-seven years of age he has had enough of a nomad existence. It is pleasant to remember his wanderings and relate his adventures while he reposes at ease by his well-warmed hearth; pleasanter still to have a graceful quick-witted daughter always at hand to minister to his numerous little wants, plan his dinners, nay, even fry an omelette, or make a dish of macaroni with parmesan, on occasions; a bright clever girl, who makes a sovereign go as far as two dispensed by a duller housekeeper. His cottage at Colehaven is the pink of prettiness, very small, but seeming so much the snugger for its smallness, daintily furnished with the relics of larger and more splendid abodes, picked up as occasion serves at sales, but always appropriate, and each object suiting its particular corner as perfectly as if it had been made to order for that very spot. This general fitness of things may in some measure be explained by the fact that Colonel and Miss Clitheroe have devoted as much forethought to, and taken as much pains about, the purchase of second-hand what-not, work-table, or easy-chair, as people of larger means bestow upon the acquirement of a landed estate. The little old-fashioned cottage, with its thatched roof and pigeon-hole windows, is full of odd corners and unexpected angles, and in every corner there is something bright and pretty to strike the stranger's eye. A triangular satin-wood cabinet, with trays of Indian shells; a quaint little bookcase with a few chosen volumes; an old German oak commode surmounted by a blue delf jar. Myra is one of those active spirits who rise with the larks, and she gives her mornings to household duties, and flits about, light of foot, with gloved hands and broad linen apron, duster, and dusting-brush; while Sarah, the maid-of-all-work, is broiling the Colonel's rasher and frying chopped potatoes for a simple Devonshire breakfast.

Colonel Clitheroe, though a soldier of fortune, has been ever an honest man. It is his boast that he has lived among spendthrifts and social Bohemians, and yet paid his way; that no tailor remembers him with a pang; that no time-yellowed page in a fashionable bootmaker's ledger records his dishonour.

In his Devonian retirement he amuses himself with literature, contributes, in his small way, to the magazines, and widens his narrow income somewhat by these means. But the pride which he takes in his literary achievements is worth far more to him than the remuneration. At Colehaven he is looked up to as one

of the authors of the day. A Colehaven person suddenly launched into London society would be infinitely surprised to find the name of Clitheroe unhonoured and unknown. At Colehaven, Colonel Clitheroe occupies the same platform as Sydney Smith and Theodore Hook once adorned in the wider world of cities. People exhibit him at their dinners as a flourishing specimen of the literary lion; his dictum upon literature, and even upon art as a half-sister to literature, is accepted as law; his latest intelligence of the world of letters heard with avidity. In fact, trading upon the smallest of capitals, Colonel Clitheroe finds himself a great man at Colehaven, and discovers that life in this remote village, with its outlying country houses, more or less hospitably inclined, is better than life in Paris or London.

His only daughter Myra is not quite so well satisfied with her surroundings at Colehaven. She has lived there nearly ten years, has grown from childhood to womanhood, in that narrow little world, and she has dim recollections of London and Paris, which are like a dream of the *Arabian Nights*. She was taken to a theatre once—a century ago it seems to her—and she can to this day recall the glitter and glory of the scene, the music, the lamp-light, the people—more people massed in one shining circle than have been in Colehaven since the creation, she imagines. She looks back regretfully to her city life as if it were all represented by that one night at the theatre, and she asks her father wonderingly how he can exist in this dull old village after his experience of brighter worlds.

“My love, if I could transfer this little box with all its appurtenances to the best part of Kensington, live as cheaply there as I do here, and be as big a man there as I am here, I would transfer myself to Kensington to-morrow; but as London or Paris for you and me would mean a shabby lodging in a third-rate neighbourhood, butcher’s meat at a shilling a pound, no cream or fresh eggs, and no county families to ask us to dinner—”

“Us,” echoes Myra fretfully. “Who asks me?”

“My love, you are not yet of an age to be invited to dinner-parties. All that will come in due course. With your beauty and accomplishments how can you fail to be invited out and made much of?”

Myra sighs and smiles, and kisses that dear foolish papa, who has such a pleasant way of saying things. She knows that, with even less opportunities, she is more accomplished than most of the girls of her acquaintance; sings better, plays more brilliantly, has a more general capacity for learning new things, a greater deftness of finger, a surer eye at archery, a more exact aim at croquet,

superior taste in the trimming of a dress, the adjustment of a ribbon, more skill in the art of making much out of little. There are the rectory girls for instance, Georgina and Caroline, Herman's sisters, how dowdily they contrive to dress; how dull and dark and heavy the rectory drawing-room looks under their industrious hands; how monotonous their garden, with the same flowers blooming in it year after year! True that Georgie and Carrie visit a great deal among the poor, and work their fingers almost to the bone at Dorcas meetings, while Myra does neither; her papa insisting upon having her always about him, as she explains to her rectory friends plaintively. But in honest truth Myra would rather fry an omelette, or make a cup of chocolate, or grate parmesan for a dish of macaroni, than sit by sick-beds in stuffy cottages reading the Bible, or sew coarse common garments with her delicate little fingers.

Her father is foolishly fond, perilously indulgent; praises his girl's pretty looks, her sweet voice, graceful winning ways, her cleverness, and general good management. She lives in an atmosphere of praise; rises every morning to be admired, lies down at night pleased with her own beauty and sweetness. The one servant is a faithful soul, who has lived with Colonel Clitheroe ever since he came to Colehaven, and she simply worships Myra, wondering at her as at some beauteous hothouse flower which has expanded and blossomed under her eyes.

The people of the Rectory, the Colonel's nearest and kindest neighbours, are almost as fond of Myra as if she were of their own flesh and blood. Many a summer afternoon she spends in the big old-fashioned garden, with its unvarying round of old-fashioned flowers; flags and columbines, and larkspurs and lupins, polyanthus, tiger-lilies, stocks, and sweet-williams; many a winter's night in the cheerful drawing-room, or playing bagatelle or acting charades in the large comfortable low-ceiled chamber which is still called the children's parlour.

Myra has introduced charades into the rectory household. This slip of a girl, who can remember but one night at a theatre, has a veritable passion for dramatic art. Before she entered her teens she had learned every word of Juliet, Queen Katherine, Constance, Lady Macbeth, Cordelia, Rosalind, and Beatrice, and she has spouted the passionate speeches to her father in the winter gloaming, while the Colonel smoked the pipe of placid idleness by his cheery fire, and taught by that loving father the girl has grown into a superb elocutionist. No shrill girlish treble, but the rich round tones of a cultivated organ swell from that column-like throat of hers. The Colonel has been an enthusiastic lover of the stage, and knows that Shakespearean round

by heart, almost as well as his daughter. He is at his best as a dramatic critic. He teaches Myra how the O'Neill used to pause here, or linger fondly on a word there, or rise at such a point to indignant passion. He remembers Sarah Siddons' awful whisper as that noble form brooded over the pit, appalling in its majestic beauty, while those dark intense eyes of hers seemed to pierce the gloom of the theatre, seeking the spirits of evil her solemn whisper invoked. He recalls Mrs. Jordan, with her joy-inspiring laugh, her free grace, her self-abandonment; and Myra hangs on his words with unvarying delight, and asks him again and again to describe that wondrous art which seems to have faded into a tradition.

Myra, being now seventeen, exhibits her dramatic powers in the children's parlour at the Rectory before select audiences of from four to six. The Rector, like all good Conservatives, is an idolater of Shakespeare.

"If I were shut up in prison as long as John Bunyan, I would ask for but two books," he says; "my Bible and my Shakespeare."

"What, George, not your fine edition of Jeremy Taylor in fifteen volumes?" cries his wife, knowing how many a small deprivation the Rector has endured in order to purchase the handsome calf-bound copy of his favourite divine.

"If I had to put Shakespeare and Taylor in the scale, my love, honest Jeremy would kick the beam, great and eloquent as he is. And I'll wager that I should find as good and true a system of morals pithily expressed in my Shakespeare as that laid down far more ornately and somewhat verbosely by my amiable Jeremy. Odd, by the bye, that the great divine, whilst constantly illustrating his arguments with quotations from the Greeks and Romans, hardly ever quotes the English playwright—a sure proof, one would say, that Shakespeare was little read, even by the erudite, in Taylor's time."

The Rector therefore, being a staunch Shakespearean, is delighted with Myra's elocutionary displays, so soon as the girl can be persuaded to recite in his hearing. Her rendering of Constance's speeches he pronounces magnificent, her sleeping scene from *Macbeth* marvellous.

Indeed, as she stood up before them all in the children's parlour, open-eyed yet seeing not, pale with deepest feeling, her low rich voice hushed to a solemn whisper, her speech broken, fitful, like the faint half-stifled murmuring of a guilty soul tossed on sleep's stormy sea, he must have been a captious critic who denied her power, or doubted that there was here the highest capacity for dramatic greatness.

As for Herman—impulsive, thoughtless, and but just turned twenty—he absolutely bows down and worships her.

"I only wish you knew Greek," he cries ecstatically, after one of her performances—the charades have been put aside by this time as childish and trivial, and they get up little scenes from Shakespeare instead of those extemporised performances—"I'd teach you Clytemnestra—in *Æschylus*, you know. That full round voice of yours would be magnificent in Greek verse."

And thereon the youthful Oxonian rolls out the description of the beacon fires that greeted the return of Agamemnon, opening his mouth very wide.

"What a lot of 'koi' and 'oi' there is in it!" cries Myra, laughing. "What a pity *Æschylus* didn't write in English!"

Myra, just at this time, though three years younger than Herman, has an air of being his senior by ever so much. She has been a woman ever since she was twelve; has been purse-bearer and general manager in the dainty cottage; has been allowed to know all the ins and outs of her father's affairs, which, in their small way, are somewhat intricate. She is a woman in the full consciousness of her beauty and her powers, and she is a woman in ambitious longing for renown.

How many a time, sitting on the hearthrug at her father's slippered feet in the friendly gloaming—that gentle half-light in which people let slip their innermost thoughts and desires more freely than in the glare of day or gas—she has exclaimed, "Papa, I mean to be famous!"

"My love, you have talents and good looks to make you distinguished anywhere; but—"

"Don't say 'but,' papa; there must be no buts. Do you remember somebody's epitaph, 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water'? If I thought that line would describe me when I am dead, I don't believe I could bear the burden of living. I don't long for money, as some people do. I haven't the faintest desire for horses and carriages, or a big house, or a regiment of servants, or even handsome dress, or rank, or station; but I want to be famous."

"My pet, I have little doubt that you'll make a brilliant marriage by and by, when you are old enough to visit among the county people"—Myra being, at the time of this conversation, about fifteen and a half.

"What, and owe everything to my husband, like lady Teazle!" cries the girl, pushing back a cloud of loose chesnut hair from her small decided face. "No, papa, I never mean to marry; I mean to be famous. Papa"—coaxingly—"would you very much object to my going on the stage, like Mrs. Siddons?"

"Myra!" exclaims the outraged father, "do you happen to remember my family?"

The Colonel is an offshoot of a noble family tree. He belongs to a clan whose chieftain is a certain Lord Perranzabuloe—a fetish to whom all the clan bow themselves down with slavish worship, though he has never been known to confer the smallest benefit upon any one of them, being a little old man who lives obscurely and unsocially in a suburban villa, like an irreligious recluse, drinks himself to the verge of delirium tremens, and suffers the dominion of an Italian opera-dancer. Yet the clan refer to him none the less proudly, and rarely utter half a dozen sentences at any social gathering without some happy allusion to "my cousin Lord Perranzabuloe," who seems to pervade their lives in some mysterious manner, although ostensibly ignoring them.

To Myra's mortal eye, her father's family has been as invisible as Mrs. Micawber's relations; but to her mind's eye they have frequently presented themselves, the Colonel reverting to them in all discussions as awful powers to be praised and propitiated, like the Greek Eumenides, and, like them, beings of malignant tendencies.

"What would my family say if a daughter of mine were to become an actress?" ejaculates Colonel Clitheroe. "Conceive the feelings of Lord Perranzabuloe!"

"But, papa, as you say he's generally tipsy, his feelings must be a little blunted by this time," remarks Myra. "And as for our relations, I daresay, in a general way they are very grand, and it's rather nice to see their names in the papers occasionally; but as they have never condescended to seem aware of my existence, I cannot understand why they need feel injured by my going on the stage. Besides, I could change my name."

"Change it as you might, the fact would leak out. The world would discover that Colonel Clitheroe's daughter was on the stage."

A year and a half later Myra is seventeen, and the same subject is again discussed as father and daughter sit by their homely hearth, the ruddy fire-light shining on the girl's eager face, and sparkling in her dark hazel eyes.

"Papa, was Mrs. Siddons a very wicked woman?"

"My dear, what can suggest such a question? Mrs. Siddons was the pink of propriety. She was received at Frogmore, and read Shakespeare to the Queen and Princesses."

"And Miss O'Neill, was she wicked?"

"Miss O'Neill was as much distinguished for her virtue as for

her genius. She married into the baronetage. You may see her name in Burke."

"Then why do you object to my going on the stage, papa? Why do you say Lord Perranzabuloe would be outraged, and all my family indignant?"

"Because the stage is not well thought of as a profession, my love."

"But why not, papa?"

The Colonel twirls his gray moustache, at a loss for a reply.

"Well—my dear—you see—there have been disreputable people on the stage."

"But there have been disreputable painters, papa. That poor Morland, for instance, whom you were talking about the other day, who drank so, and used to paint with a glass of brandy-and-water in his left hand, and sent some pigs to the pawnbroker's before they were dry, so that the pawnbroker rubbed out one little pig accidentally with his thumb. Yet nobody calls painting a disreputable profession. And there have been wicked people who wrote books; wicked lawyers, even great judges; and sometimes even a wicked clergyman. Why should people look down upon the stage as a profession?"

Again the Colonel twirls his moustache, and knows not how to answer this eager disputant.

Meanwhile the girl's love of dramatic art grows with her power of expression. Her taste, her untutored talents astonish every one. With a few old shawls and scarves and worthless odds and ends she can attire herself with a wondrous grace and picturesqueness. Her rapid changes of costume are like sleight-of-hand. The charm and variety of her elocution, the beauty of her voice, the vivacity and expression which constitute the chief attraction of her small finely-cut face, are admired by every member of her narrow circle, but by none so ardently as by Herman Westray. There is just enough, in her unlikeness to all other women, to catch the fancy of a young man; and before that last Long Vacation is over, Herman is deeply in love, with the one only true, absorbing, unchanging, eternal passion which attacks a youth of twenty as ferociously as whooping-cough lays its iron grip upon tender infancy.

So in that shady lane which Mrs. Brandreth so vividly remembers, Herman tells Colonel Clitheroe's daughter his love; and she responds, sobbing, that she means to be single all her life, and famous—solitary and miserable, perhaps, like a female Child Harold, but at any price famous. And then, wooed persistently, a fond arm encircling her, dark-blue eyes looking down into hers, words coming swiftly—words that seem eloquent as noblest

verse—the girl is won to admit that if she could love any one, it would be Herman; if she could resign her hope of fame for any one, it would be for Herman; if she could consent to die inglorious, but live loving and beloved—if she could submit to have her name written in water—it would be for Herman; nay, at last, that she does love him—that she will forego all things for his sake—will be his for all time: so soon as he shall have taken orders, and that curacy which is his present object and hope shall be obtained by him. Thus they leave the lane plighted lovers; and Myra, although deeply happy, resigns with a regretful sigh all thought of being as famous as Miss O'Neill.

Herman goes back to Oxford, and reads harder than ever; and just at this time a fever of strong opinion quickens the pulse of thought at that grave old university. Some take the fever one way, some another. Some tranquil souls escape the fiery blast unscathed. Some go over to Rome; some stop short at Ritualism. Some find their convictions overthrown like a rickety temple of frailest carpentry, and wander away, beyond the light of former guiding stars, into a howling wilderness of unbelief. Herman takes the infection badly, and joins these last. He discovers that his convictions are not earnest enough for the Church—that too much Aristotle has been the death of his spiritualism. He shrinks from announcing this change of feeling to the dear old father at home, or the fond faithful mother, or the pious sisters; but he writes a long and wild epistle to Myra, which she does not understand in the least, and sends her Shelley, by way of pioneer of his new opinions, whom she comprehends even less.

Before this year is out the good-natured old Colonel dies suddenly of an apoplectic seizure—sad result of ten years' ease and high living—and a member of the invisible family comes forward to take possession of Myra; a female member, a military widow, with a strong moustache and a manner suggestive of cavalry—a lady who resides at Bath, in which city she is honoured and admired as Mrs. Major Pompion. Mrs. Major Pompion is the late colonel's half-sister, and consequently Myra's aunt.

"Remember, my dear, I am a Clitheroe," she says proudly. "My father married twice. His first wife, your father's mother, was connected with trade—her people supplied ships with biscuits and ropes, and that kind of thing—wealthy but plebeian. My mother was a baronet's seventh daughter, and as poor as a church mouse. You see I am not afraid of putting things in plain English."

Mrs. Pompion knows all the best people in Bath, and under

Mrs. Pompion's military escort Myra sees more society than would have been possible at Colehaven, were the county people never so friendly. Mrs. Major Pompion's circle is strong in the martial element, and by the time Myra has left off her mourning that young lady is better posted in military affairs than any other damsel in Bath. Her singing, her vivacity, her elocution—for she is prevailed upon to give a recitation at a small friendly party now and then—win her a host of admirers, and one day being deeply offended with Herman's neglect of her last letter—his father is dead by this time, and he is fighting the battle of life, heavily weighted—Myra Clitheroe listens to the impassioned pleading of a certain Captain Brandreth, who has pursued her for the last six months, and breaks her troth to Herman Westray. This Captain Brandreth—Charley Brandreth among his intimates—is good-looking, hare-brained, good-natured, extravagant—not rich in the present, but with large expectations, and heir-presumptive to a baronetcy.

Mrs. Major Pompion is delighted at this turn of affairs. Mrs. Major Pompion is all over Bath in her hired landau next day announcing dear Myra's engagement. She has taken the girl out of kindly feeling, as well as family pride—it wouldn't do for a Clitheroe to go out in the world as a nursery governess, or serve in a shop—but she has never intended the girl to hang upon her for years, and here is a most eligible opportunity for planting the sweet child out in life.

So Myra is allowed no time to change her mind—no opportunity for drawing back; arrangements are made with wondrous promptness—preparations hurried on. She has hardly time to think.

"I shall give you your trousseau, my love, and it shall be worthy of a Clitheroe," says Mrs. Major Pompion affectionately. "If I should find myself crippled by and by in consequence of the outlay, you will be able to make it up to me when Charley comes into his property."

The affianced captain is "Charley" already with Mrs. Major Pompion.

Charley is not actually disagreeable, and is desperately in love. He plunges into debt for presents—gloves, bouquets, theatre and concert tickets. Myra's days and nights go by in a whirligig of small pleasures—and one morning she awakes to find it is her wedding-day.

She is honestly sorry for Herman—whom she remembers rather as the boy she played with years ago than as the young man who wooed her in the lane. She has written him a pretty little penitent letter, blaming herself very much and assuring him

that she is not worthy his regret ; but to this letter there has been no reply.

So they are married, and Myra begins the wildest, gayest, and for a time perhaps, just while the novelty lasts, the happiest life she has ever known. She is the belle of the garrison, a queen in her small way. That histrionic genius of hers now comes into full play. She acts in drawing-room theatricals, and by and by Charley and his brother officers go mad upon acting, and get up amateur performances in concert-rooms and theatres—for the benefit of some charitable institution or other—and the regiment loses its head generally, inspired—bewitched, the colonel says—by Mrs. Brandreth ; until one day there is a muddle in the accounts after one of these amateur performances—out of ninety-seven pounds fourteen and sixpence gross returns only nine pounds fifteen being forthcoming for the Colour-Sergeants' Widows and Orphans Fund. The rent of the room is ten guineas, the gas two ; the regimental bandmaster has received a douceur of five ; printing has cost five more ; hire of costumes another ten. There is an awful deficit somehow, which Charley, who is treasurer and acting-manager, finds himself powerless to explain, and it leaks out that the accounts of previous performances have been administered in a slipshod and unsatisfactory manner—whereupon Captain Brandreth is politely advised by his colonel that the wisest thing he can do is to sell his commission forthwith. He submits to the painful necessity, and he and Myra spend that autumn—the third of their wedded life—in furnished lodgings at Leamington.

Perhaps the disgrace breaks Charley's heart. Hard to be broken—put to open shame among his brother officers—for a paltry fifty pounds, which has been muddled away somehow while he was carrying the daily proceeds of the sale of tickets loose in his waistcoat pockets, meaning to square up and make all things straight at a convenient opportunity. At any rate, he takes to drinking deeply and riding wildly, and between the two contrives to get his neck broken one misty November morning out with Lord Leigh's hounds, and thus make a sudden end of Myra's wedded life.

All the old brother-officers are kind to the poor lonely little widow—too kind, perhaps ; for Myra is too attractive to escape slander, and women friends she has none. Poor Charley has died before his expectations could become realities, and Mrs. Major Pompion feels that her niece has thrown away her chances, and severely reprobates Myra's dramatic follies as the primary cause of Charley's ruin and death. Nay, have there not been two children born to that frivolous young couple, one of whom

would have been heir to Charley's expectations had death spared the frail sprig of humanity? and even the untimely decease of these innocents Mrs. Major Pompion puts down to the account of Myra's infatuation for the drama.

"Poor little neglected things!" cries the lady to her gossips; "what chance could they have with a mother who thought more of acting Lady Gay Spanker than of nursing her babies? And those precious treasures heirs-presumptive to fifteen thousand a year!"

Retribution—fell, dire, and fully deserved—has fallen upon Myra Brandreth. That is the sentence of condemnation pronounced by the Vehmgericht of Bath.

Thus, deserted by her aunt and female friends, pitied and befriended by her husband's intimates, Myra begins the world for the third time, under a cloud. And now the time has come for her to realise that old dream and desire of her childhood. She stands quite alone. The small estate she inherits from her husband would just serve to maintain her in obscurity; but Myra cannot submit to dwell for ever in obscurity. She goes to London, sees agents and managers, and of her own unaided energy procures an appearance as Juliet, on an off night, at a West-end theatre. She is successful enough to obtain an immediate offer of a leading position from a provincial manager; and from that hour her progress is essentially rapid. A year later she is the principal comedy actress at a first-class London theatre, her talent an established fact, press and public alike on her side, her triumph complete. She has won the prize she pined for in her early girlhood—realised that vision she had so often seen in the winter gloaming, sitting at her father's feet, looking into the ruddy coals, and beholding a glorified picture of herself, radiant, resplendent, with a city at her feet.

The dear old father is gone—he who would so have rejoiced in her success—who would have been rejuvenated by her fame—the kind old father, whom she had fondly loved, after her impulsive inconsiderate fashion; and poor Charley too, whom she liked passably well. She is very lonely, and gladly receives flatteries and small attentions, for lack of love; and thus gives more license to Lord Earlswood's admiration than the world deems altogether wise. He has rarely spent a *tête-à-tête* half-hour in her society—so rarely that he can count the occasions, and treasures the memory of them—yet the world couples their names, and pityingly murmurs, "Poor Lady Earlswood, what has *she* done that she takes things so quietly?"

Soon after Myra's establishment as one of the stars of the dramatic hemisphere Herman Westray publishes that book by

which he attains notoriety—half-sister to Fame—at a leap ; and as his reputation grows, and the world praises him, and women shed tears over his pages, the popular actress looks back with a sigh to those unforgotten days when he was hers—lying at her feet in the late August noontides, in the misty September twilight—her slave, with nothing in the world to do

“but tend
Upon the hours and times of her desire.”

She has thought of him many a time in the careless years of her married life, when Charley's inanity has come home to her a little more sharply than usual—when the fact that she was wedded to a fool has jarred upon some sensitive chord in her nature. She has thought of him very often in her solitary widowhood, wondering whether he will ever come back to her—wondering why he does not come—thinking him hard and unkind for withholding his notice and his praise, now that all the world notices and praises her.

She is among the first to read his books. O, how they speak to her of the days that are gone—of himself ! He has laid his own heart upon the dissecting table, and anatomised its every pulse, its every throe. She knows now how utterly that heart was hers—how torn and wounded by her desertion—how embittered by her falsehood. She comes face to face with him once more, in those vivid pages, and the very breath of her youth comes back to her. She hears his passionate words. She is young and true and beloved again, ready to surrender all else that life can yield her for his dear sake. She reads, and the smouldering love flames up with a brighter, stronger fire than of old, and she knows that she loves her first lover still, and must so love him to the end of life.

One day, at a garden-party on the banks of the Thames—a party given by a popular comedian—an assembly at once artistic, literary, and dramatic—Herman and Myra meet again, so changed, both of them, by seven years of severance ; man of the world, woman of the world, accomplished in the polite art of self-repression both. She greets him with graceful tranquillity ; he renews an old acquaintance with gracious candour. They talk of the dear dead fathers, the old home, to which neither would like to return, though they praise it so pathetically ; and from that time the popular actress and the popular author are friends. Herman spends his Sunday afternoons in Myra's drawing-room in Bloomsbury—she has no grand pretensions, famous though she is—and the world begins to exclaim, “Poor Lord Earlswood !”

But in three years of pleasant easy-going friendship, not one word of the old love has Herman ever spoken. His very friendliness is the most puissant armour against the shafts of love. And Myra knows that the passionate past is dead and buried, and fears no art of hers may ever charm it back to life again; yet would give half her life—yes, all the later elderly half of existence—for the power to make love young again, as Medea revived the youth of Æson.

CHAPTER VIII.

“I had died for this last year, to know
 You loved me. Who shall turn on fate?
 I care not if love come or go
 Now, though your love seek mine for mate—
 It is too late.

You loved me and you loved me not;
 A little, much, and evermuch.
 Will you forget as I forget?
 Let all dead things lie dead; none such
 Are soft to touch!”

THE winter season grows older. The Frivolity Theatre is a success. Lavish expenditure in the beautification of the house; a certain flavour of aristocracy which pertains to it on account of its patrician owner; Mrs. Brandreth's popularity; a well-chosen company, and a good play—have achieved the desired result. The Frivolity is the fashion. Its stalls are engaged a fortnight in advance; its private boxes are rarely given away, never empty. The best people go to the Frivolity, sure of not being outraged by anything vulgar in dress or dialogue. Mrs. Brandreth's correct taste is a kind of warranty. Patronised by the aristocracy, and crowded nightly by the upper middle classes, the theatre pays, and pays well. Lord Earlswood has no occasion to be indulgent about his rent; Mrs. Brandreth's cheque reaches him, in the most formal manner, on quarter-day. Vainly he carries it back to her; vainly urges that, instead of wasting her profits on such an outside matter as rent, she should remove to some pretty house near the Parks, and set up her Victoria and brougham, instead of driving a hired vehicle, with a jog-trot gray-horse very much in

request at Bloomsbury weddings, and as well known at evening parties as the linkman.

Myra smiles at the suggestion.

"One swallow does not make a summer," she replies, "nor does one lucky season insure a permanent success. We may be playing to empty benches next year. Besides, these rooms serve my purpose well enough, and are larger than any I could get at the West-end at four times the rent I pay for these."

His lordship glances round the apartment with a depreciating eye, but is fain to own that it is "not half a bad kind of room, after all." It is an old-fashioned drawing-room in Bloomsbury-square, panelled, lofty, spacious. The furniture is ancient, like the room; ponderous, but so thoroughly in harmony with the room as to have a certain grace and beauty of its own. A hundred trifles of Myra Brandreth's arrangement and devising lend their charm to the heavy old chairs and tables; a carved Indian davenport, by Deschamps of Madras, stands open in one of the deeply-recessed windows; old china, old Venetian glass, from the cottage at Colehaven, light up the dim corners on this dusky afternoon with gleams of brightness and colour; book-stands, terra-cotta statuettes of opera singers, just imported from Paris, bronzed candelabra from Barbedienne's, the heterogeneous offerings of admiring acquaintance, beautify the room. The tall looking-glass over the chimney, in its old-fashioned pillared frame, reflects firelight and colour and glitter. Heavy folds of claret-coloured cloth drape the windows. The room is full of rich yet subdued colour; the open piano, the pile of crimson-bound music-books, the reading-stand by Myra's low arm-chair, all have their grace in his lordship's eye.

"How beautiful you would make Redhill Park!" he exclaims, thinking of that lordly mansion in Surrey, where Lady Earlswood rules supreme in a solitude as of Mount Athos or La Trappe, and carries Evangelical principles to the verge of fanaticism.

"I daresay Redhill is beautiful without any help of mine," replies Myra, feeling that they are getting upon dangerous ground. Lord and Lady Earlswood's relations for the last five years have been an armed neutrality. Her ladyship exercises the gifts and graces of the spirit at Redhill; deals out hop-sack clothing and horse-cloth blankets, tracts, and ghostly counsel to all the old women of the neighbourhood, and never mentions his lordship without a shudder, as a brand predoomed to burning, not born that he might be judged, but judged before he was born.

His lordship meanwhile leads the life which beseems him; not a particularly profitable life, it must be owned, to himself or any one else, saving always certain West-end tradesmen and a staff of

overpaid servants. He thinks with a regretful sigh of what that ancestral home of his might have been if Myra had been in his own set, and he had met and loved her in time. Worse than vain to think of her now. It is not her virtue that appals him, but her indifference not to himself alone, but to all things that tempt other women.

So Myra pays her rent, and Lord Earlswood tells people that that theatrical venture of his is a lucky hit, and pays him nearly five per cent. Myra occupies her old-fashioned Bloomsbury-square apartments, and lives as quietly as a curate, and is actually saving money; for although not greedy of gain, she has had enough of the education of poverty to know that it is well to be a few hundreds in advance of one's daily needs. She dresses exquisitely on and off the stage; but as her own artistic taste, and not other people's extravagance, rules her toilette, its cost is in no way ruinous.

Herman she sees occasionally on a Sunday afternoon, on which day her room is sometimes crowded with callers; but not every Sunday afternoon, as he was wont to come to her last year, dining with her sometimes, and staying late into the evening, talking literature and art, or that pleasant worldly talk in which the merits and reputations, intellectual gifts and social qualities, of our dearest friends come under the scalpel. When she upbraids him with the rareness of his visits, he tells her that he is deep in a new book, a story which is to be something better than his old stories, truer to nature, higher and purer in art; something which some other writer, lauded by qualities which he, Herman, is supposed to lack, might have written.

"I foresee a failure," says Mrs. Brandreth, jealous of the work which robs her of his society. "Do you remember that story in Forster's *Goldsmith* of the man who amused the audience at Covent-garden, while the curtain was down, by a very clever imitation of a cow? Emboldened by their applause he essayed other animals, when a Scottish voice from the gallery cried, 'Stick to the coo, mon!' Don't you think that having succeeded in one line it is hazardous to attempt another?"

"Thanks for the friendly caution, but I don't believe honest work can ever be thrown away; and if my next book prove a failure, the labour I shall have given it will be not the less helpful to me as an artist. There are books a man writes which are like the solfeggi that make a singer's voice flexible; there may be nothing in the solfeggi, but when that voice attacks a real melody, the strength of past labour is its glory. I am ready to accept my failures as education."

"How much you have altered since last winter!" says Myra thoughtfully.

"For the worse, perhaps?"

"I won't say that; but you have grown serious—serious à *faire frémir*."

"May not a man be in earnest now and then?"

"Perhaps. But the now and then should be very far apart. Your late earnestness is chronic. I want you to write me a comedy for Easter; all grace and sparkle; modern to extremity; crystallising the very life of the day; a photograph of the season; as personal as you can make it without being libellous."

"My Muse is not as the Muse of Foote, and does not delight in personality. Besides, I doubt if I shall write for the stage this year."

"What, not after the success of *Hemlock*! You have acknowledged that it paid you better than anything you have done in literature."

"Remuneration is not the ultimate aim of art."

"Perhaps not; but it would be rather unkind of you to refuse to write for me, when you know that my success in life depends on the success of the Frivolity."

"And my last piece having succeeded, does it follow that my next will be equally fortunate? The blue ribbon of the turf is rarely won two consecutive years by the same stable. Why not try a new hand?"

Myra shrugs her shoulders impatiently. She had rather fail in a play of his—or, at least, rather sustain a weak play of his by the power of her acting—than produce a better play by any one else. And he cannot see this; he cannot understand that it is sweet to her to be allied with him even in art. Those fine shades of a woman's feelings are beyond his comprehension, artist though he is.

In all their friendly intercourse of the last three years neither has ever spoken of their dead past. Myra would give worlds to break the ice that covers those deep waters of memory; but Herman is silent, and she dare not approach the subject. However deeply he may have felt her abandonment of him long ago, he has evidently forgiven her now. The fact of his forgiveness is more galling to her soul than his fiercest wrath could be. Nay, could she but make him angry she would have cause for hope.

The season wears on—January, February, March. London is filling, but as yet there is no sign of Mr. Morcombe or of the bill for the extension of the Pen-y-craig Railway. Herman takes the trouble to hunt up a friend versed in parliamentary business,

in the hope of discovering when the Pen-y-craig extension is likely to come on; but the dim future reveals not the form of Pen-y-craig. Herman has heard nothing of the Lochwithian family from Richard Dewrance, who has accepted the charge of a Protestant flock in the south of France, where his convictions are widening every day, until between his acceptance of the reformed Church and that older Church out of which it grew there runs but a narrow brooklet of difference.

March sees the publication of Herman's new novel, the book in which he has striven to rise out of his old familiar self into something better; the story which in his heart of hearts he has dedicated to Editha Morcombe, the girl who has been but a passing shadow across his life, and yet, unawares, has deeply influenced his thoughts.

Alas for the fate of faithful work and lofty aspirations! The book is a failure. Kindly critics condemn with faint praise, recognise the intention of the writer, applaud the idyllic simplicity of the story, the purity of the sentiments, and give their readers a general impression of weakness and a half-realised design. The *Censor*—in a slashing article three columns long—falls upon the fated volumes hip and thigh; ruthless as Jeffrey in his attack upon Wordsworth. "Extract the acid cynicism and the half-veiled immorality from Mr. Westray's style, and the result is about as palatable as lemonade without lemon or sugar," says the *Censor*, summing up with the grand air of papal infallibility which distinguishes that journal. "*His Last Love* is a novel which a schoolgirl might be proud to have written, for the grammar is faultless and the French quotations in no case misspelt. It is a work which Mr. Tupper might father without fear of lessening his hold upon the middle-class intellect, and it is a curious illustration of the depth of bathos to which a really clever writer may descend when he tries to dazzle his admirers in a line of art for which he lacks every element of success. Only to a Balzac is it given to create two such types as Valérie de Marneffe and Eugénie Grandet. Mr. Westray's sympathies are obviously with the former class, and his portraiture of *ces espèces* is not without merit. Let him stick to tinsel, with which he has achieved some rather brilliant effects, and not waste his labour in deep-sinking operations upon an imagination which does not abound in gold."

No voice has come down from heaven to pronounce the *Censor* infallible, and even earthly opinion varies in its estimate of that journal's wisdom and disinterestedness; yet this review wounds Herman as keenly as if all the voices of heaven and earth had acknowledged the critic's judgment unassailable. His

book is the expression of all that was best and truest in his mind, and neither press nor public cares a straw for it. His publishers politely regret that the second edition has been somewhat slower in sale than any previous work of the author's; altogether, Herman is compelled to confess that the book is a failure.

He drops in upon Myra on Sunday evening. Yesterday's *Censor* lies open on her reading-desk, and that expressive face of hers wears an indignant look. It changes at sight of him to a tender sympathy; she comes to him without a word and takes his hand affectionately, as if he had just lost some one very dear to him. The ridiculous element in the position strikes him sharply—despite the actual pain which has attended his disappointment.

"You were a true prophet, you see, Myra. The critics condemn my book. I see you have been reading the *Censor*."

There is something else which he sees—traces of tears around the dark eyes—angry tears which she has wiped away hastily at his entrance.

"It is infamous—unjust—malignant!"

"Malignant? Not the least in the world. If I were to meet the writer to-morrow, we should be bosom friends. But the *Censor* is nothing without slashing criticism. I am sorry to say the book is a failure—even an adverse review won't help it. But, as I told you before, a book written is so much labour done—the worker must be the better for it."

"Your book is lovely—I have read and cried over it—good, true, pure, noble! O Herman, if you knew how I feel my injustice to you!"

One thing he does know—that they are getting upon dangerous ground. Myra is more excited than he has ever seen her, even on the opening night of the season, when the fortunes of the new theatre were at stake. Hectic spots burn in her cheeks—the dark hazel eyes are feverishly bright.

"It is kind and friendly of you to take this matter to heart," he replies in his calmest tones; "but, believe me, you distress yourself needlessly."

"Kind and friendly! How can you talk of kindness and friendliness from me to you! Herman, do you think I have forgotten? Can you have so utterly forgotten on your part as to believe it possible for me to forget?" with passionate tears. "I threw away your love when it was verily mine—foolish—ignorant of my own heart. O Herman, can it never be mine again? can the dear old days never come back? I was little more than a child when I wronged you, and had but a child's

knowledge of your worth. I am a woman now, educated by sorrow; and my love for you—my knowledge of you—has grown with my growth. Can I never win back what I lost? Am I so worthless a creature, I whom the world praises, that my penitence and my love count for nothing with you, Herman?" she asks with piteous pleading.

Five minutes ago, and, to herself, this confession would have seemed of all things the most impossible. The words have burst from her in a little gust of passion, sudden as a stormy blast rushing in at a rashly-opened casement. She turns from Herman, after that last question, stricken with shame, and bows her head upon the mantelpiece, hiding the crimson of her tearful face.

He approaches her, takes her hand in his, ever so gently, and with gravest tenderness replies :

"My dear, the age of miracles is past, and in our days the dead do not come back to life. I shall be your friend always, Myra ; your lover never again."

CHAPTER IX.

"O, fair is Love's first hope to gentle mind,
 As Eve's first star through fleecy cloudlet peeping;
 And sweeter than the gentle south-west wind,
 O'er willowy meads and shawdow'd waters creeping,
 And Ceres' golden fields!"

IN the first flush of publication, before the *Censor* and the rest of the literary journals had issued the fiat of critical opinion, Herman had sent a copy of *His Last Love* to Squire Morcombe of Lochwithian, with a polite note, in which he modestly hinted that if the ladies of the household would deign to read his book, such condescension on their part would afford him infinite gratification.

The novel has been published a month, and the author has had the satisfaction of reading criticism pitched in every key, from the C sharp minor of reprobation to the gentle E flat major of mild approval, when among his letters one morning he finds a thick packet, with the Lochwithian postmark and the monogram R. M.

It is from Ruth ; a long letter, praising his book as no one has praised it yet, with praise that comes from perfect understanding of the writer's intention, perfect sympathy with the writer's mind.

"We have shed many tears over your pages," writes Miss Morcombe—and that little word *we* is very precious to Herman. "We feel as if this book has made you indeed our friend. All that was harsh and cynical, all that had a false ring in your former works—pray forgive me if I am too candid—is absent here. The heart of the writer throbs in every page, and it is a noble heart. The book is full of life and truth and earnestness and faith in good things ; and I have no power to judge of books or men if it is not ultimately the most popular of all your stories and that to which you will owe enduring fame."

"Let the *Censor* go hang !" cries Herman, moved to enthusiasm by a woman's letter, written from a sick-room. "One true woman's heart has been moved by my book—one pure mind has recognised its worth."

He reads and re-reads the letter. It contains not a word about the Lochwithian Extension—not a hint of Editha's visit to London. The railway people may have changed their minds, may have deferred their petition indefinitely. He is sorely disappointed.

"Come what may, I shall go down to Llandrysak in July," he thinks, "and drink the waters and be made whole. Orpheus braved the burning blasts of Tartarus in quest of his love, and shall I shrink from imbibing a few pails of sulphur-water?"

And then—what then? It is not to be supposed that he, Herman Westray, a man of the world, a student of human nature, an anatomiser of other people's passions, a tranquil spectator of the great life drama—it is surely not to be supposed that he has fallen in love with a girl whom he has seen just four times, and whose education, principles, surroundings, are in every respect different from his own. No, Herman hardly believes himself in love with Editha Morcombe, but he is fain to confess that he is interested in her—ay, with something more than a mere artistic interest—that she is something more to him than a lay figure. He has thought of her, he has wondered about her not a little in the days and nights that have gone by since he last saw her, and has even speculated upon the possibility that they two may not be, after all, so unsuited to each other as he had first believed, and so strenuously asserted to Dewrance.

He lives his life as of old—dines at his club and at other men's clubs, goes to theatres and parties, flirts occasionally with a

graceful languor, says clever things, or is supposed to say them, begins another story, writes the first act of a comedy for Mrs. Brandreth, whose house he has avoided since that Sunday evening when she rashly lifted the curtain of the past, though he sees her occasionally behind the scenes at the Frivolity.

Although he does not forget Editha Morcombe, although she is often in his thoughts, her image is hardly a disturbing influence as yet. The shaft has not pierced deep enough for that. And thus time slips gently by till the first Monday in May, when Herman Westray goes to the Royal Academy to see the people and hear the public verdict on the pictures. These he has seen before—some on the easels of the painters, all at the private view.

Here, in the crowd and the heat and the Babel of voices—not loud, but multitudinous—he comes suddenly upon some one whom he feels curiously pleased to meet.

Mr. Dewrance stands opposite a landscape of Linnell's, expounding its beauties in that loud distinct pulpit voice of his, to three young women and a showily-bonneted matron, all evidently under his wing.

"Observe the hazy yellow atmosphere—positively steeped in light," he exclaims.

"Rather like the neighbourhood of Llandrysak" says Herman, laying his hand upon the Curate's shoulder.

"Too much corn for Radnorshire—How d'ye do, Westray? Thought I knew the voice. What do you think of the pictures this year? Rather below par, eh? They paint too much, these fellows."

"Rubens painted too much; so would any man if he could get a thousand pounds for every square yard of canvas he could cover. I think the pictures are pretty much as usual: manipulation in most cases good; subjects in many cases weak; ideas repetitive of last year, the year before that, and backwards to the days of Somerset House."

"Let me introduce you to my friends. Mr. Westray—Mrs. Peacock Smith, Miss Peacock Smith, Miss Cordelia, Miss Beatrice Smith, from New York."

The three young ladies survey Herman with wondering enthusiasm, pleased to discover that his clothes and boots are like those of other people, and that he bends himself to the usages of society so far as to have his hair cut.

"I wish he'd say something satirical," whispers the fair Cordelia to her elder sister.

"He's one of the authors we wanted to see," replies Miss Smith in the same undertone; "but I don't think his looks are up to the standard of his works."

"Where are you and what are you doing, Dewrance?" asks Herman. "I heard you were somewhere in the south of France."

"Only came back in April; wintered in the shelter of the Pyrenees. Plenty of nice people—found myself quite absurdly popular. I am first curate at a new church in Bayswater, St. Januarius. Perhaps you know it—a very beautiful specimen of the flamboyant style, and fashionably attended. The church is filled daily at our matin service, and our collections are the largest in the parish. When will you come and dine with me? I have rooms in Bolivia-gardens, near the church."

"I'll tell you that when you dine with me. You ought to have come to see me directly you established yourself in London."

"I have been intending to come, but my duties are so absorbing."

"Naturally, with a fashionable congregation. Those duties include a good deal of dining out, to say nothing of kettledrums and friendly luncheons. As if I didn't know you, Dewrance."

The Curate grins. The Peacock Smiths gaze at Herman with eyes enlarged by wonder, surprised that any one should venture to address a popular pastor in so mundane a tone.

"Come and breakfast with me to-morrow," says Herman by and by, after having performed a little small talk with the Miss Smiths, who exclaim, "How lovely!" "How sweet!" at every second canvas they see, and are deeply interested in the five different Ophelias which, more or less drowning, grace the walls of the Academy and impart a sense of damp and depression to the exhibition.

"After matins?" inquires Dewrance.

"Of course—say ten o'clock; and we can talk of our friends in Wales. By the way, have you heard from the Lochwithian people lately?"

"I dined with them the day before yesterday."

"In London?"

"Yes. They have taken apartments in Lima-crescent, near me—or rather, I should say, I took the rooms for them, the Squire having intrusted me with the selection."

"Have they been in town long?" asks Herman with a mortified look.

"Not more than a week, I think. Mr. Morcombe was talking of calling on you."

"He is very good," says Herman, who finds it bitter that Dewrance should have been preferred to him. Yet the preference is but natural, Dewrance being the older friend.

Mr. Morcombe leaves his card at Mr. Westray's chambers three days later, having most likely received a reminder from the

Curate, Herman thinks, with a twinge of vexation. The young man is out when the Squire calls; but he presents himself at Lima-crescent next day, and is fortunate enough to find Editha at home.

She has come to town under the wing of a middle-aged cousin, a clergyman's widow, and altogether a prosperous comfortable personage, with a large appetite for small pleasures—a lady who has been buried alive in a remote Welsh parish during the brightest years of womanhood, and who is glad to make the most of her decline. Not a wrinkle has Time written on Mrs. Evan Williams's placid brow, nor has that avenger thinned her brown hair. Middle age has come upon her gently, with gradual increase of bulk and a subsidiary chin or two. She carries about her, as it were, an atmosphere of the country, wears her watch conspicuously displayed below her waistband, and a handsome silk gown, which is new as to material, but ten years old as to cut.

Editha's bright look is full of welcome, Herman thinks, as she turns from the ferncase in the window and comes forward to receive him.

"I thought you would come to see us," she says; and then introduces him to "my cousin, Mrs. Williams," whom she addresses presently as Juliana; whereat the fair Juliana becomes immediately upon intimate terms with Mr. Westray, and goes into raptures about his books.

"Editha has them all; and when I stay at the Priory I get her to lend them to me. I have sat up ever so late, night after night, reading them; and now to think of seeing the writer! It does seem so extraordinary. Of course I always knew they must be written by somebody, but I never thought it would be my fate to meet him."

Such a simple-minded chaperon as this is the next best thing to no chaperon at all, Herman thinks, and he and Editha talk as freely as if they were alone—talk of Ruth and Wales; of Mr. Petherick and his flock; of literature, art, music, all things dear to both; Editha making friendly little appeals to Juliana every now and then, lest that comfortable matron should fancy herself excluded from their talk. In the course of conversation Mrs. Williams makes numerous inquiries about theatres and popular concerts, and it appears to Herman that she is thirsting for amusement of the dramatic and musical kind; whereupon he hastens to promise private boxes for fashionable theatres and tickets for ballad concerts.

"I do love English ballads," exclaims the matron, "though I'm afraid I can't claim to be as musical as the rest of my nation;

for when it comes to chamber-music, and a symphony that lasts a quarter of an hour, I must say I feel myself out of place, and often in the minor passages I'm on tenter-hooks, thinking that the performers are all going wrong. So give me a simple ballad, and the words pronounced so that I can hear them; and then I know where I am and what I am called upon to admire."

"You like the theatres, Miss Morcombe?" inquires Herman, after politely sympathising with Mrs. Williams on the chamber-music question.

"I expect to be delighted; but we have been to no theatre yet. Papa took us to the Opera last night, and that was more exquisite than I have ever fancied it in my dreams."

"You would like to see some of the theatres?"

"Very much; I am particularly anxious to see your comedy at the Frivolity."

Easter is past, but *Hemlock* has not yet been taken out of the bill.

"Would you really like to see it?" exclaims Herman, delighted.

"Will you go to-night? I can always get a box; I'll go to the nearest office and telegraph for a good one, if you'll say yes."

Editha hesitates. "I don't know what engagements papa may have for to-night," she says.

"Indeed, my dear Editha, your papa's engagements need not prevent our going," exclaims Mrs. Williams. "Am I not here to take you about? Did not the Squire expressly say that we are to enjoy ourselves without reference to his occupations? And indeed he is very much occupied about this Pen-y-craig Extension, and has to dine out a great deal; for it seems that these public works hinge upon private dining. Did he not say that we could go anywhere we liked this evening with Mr. Hetheridge?"

Editha blushes furiously.

"Hetheridge!" cries Herman, reddening as vividly. "Is Mr. Hetheridge in London?"

"Yes, he is here for the season," replies Mrs. Williams. "You know him, do you, Mr. Westray? Isn't he nice?"

"If I had ever been able to arrive at the exact meaning ladies attach to that adjective, I could give you a categorical answer. Honestly, I have seen too little of Mr. Hetheridge to express an opinion about him."

"Come, Editha, why should we not accept Mr. Westray's kind offer?" asks Mrs. Williams. "Mr. Hetheridge is to dine with us this evening. If Mr. Westray would join us at dinner, we could all go to the Frivolity together. I suppose a box would hold four?"

"Certainly," says Herman, thinking of those snug little satin-lined boxes, and how closely he will have to bend over Editha's chair all the evening. "I accept your kind invitation with pleasure, Mrs. Williams, and I'll go and despatch my telegram directly, dress, and return here."

"At seven. Will that be early enough, by the bye?"

"Quite, if you want only to see my piece. It begins at half-past eight."

Editha makes no further objections to the plan, and Herman departs, foolishly happy for so slight a reason. He is back again in Lima-crescent at a quarter to seven, and finds Mr. Hetheridge installed. That gentleman is sitting next to Editha, and talking to her in an undertone, as she bends over her point-lace, but the conversation does not appear particularly lively.

The young landowner is surprised, and not agreeably, at the entrance of Mr. Westray, and the two men glower at each other as they exchange greetings.

"Hang the fellow, what is he doing here?" thinks Vivian Hetheridge, unaware until this moment of the pleasure that awaited him.

"Mr. Westray has kindly suggested that we shall all go to the Frivolity Theatre this evening," says Mrs. Williams, who begins dimly to divine that she has done hardly a wise thing in inviting Herman. Every one at Lochwithian wishes Editha to marry Mr. Hetheridge; nay, it is an understood thing that she is to marry him—that it is for her ultimate good here and hereafter to be Mrs. Hetheridge of Hetheridge Park, and that any capricious objections of her own are to be overruled by the powers that be. Mr. Morcombe has bidden his daughter and her cousin to amuse themselves, to extract all the pleasure they can from a month or six weeks in London; but he has imagined that the companion of their pleasures, their escort, their guide, would be none other than Vivian Hetheridge, who is supposed to be, for two or three months in the year, a man about town.

Mrs. Williams is quick to see that there is something more than common courtesy in Herman's attention, that there are germs of jealousy sprouting in the hotbed of Vivian's heart, and that, in a general way, she has made a mistake. But being by nature a lively matron, and by long suppression of that natural liveliness made livelier, she does not abandon herself to affliction, but enjoys herself so thoroughly as to impart a sense of enjoyment to others.

It is the pleasantest little dinner-party in the world. The Squire has come home only to dress, and gone forth again to dine, too hurried to hear the plans of his womankind. The two young

men brighten wonderfully at the dinner-table, but Herman has in every way the best of it. He knows so much—can talk of so much—has ideas of his own which, if of no great intrinsic worth, have at least the charm of novelty, just as some modern invention—Abyssinian, Peruvian, or Zanzibar gold—sparkles prettily for the moment, though but basest metal. Editha is gaiety itself. No trace of the serious young woman here, thinks Herman, and anon reflects that seriousness with her is so gracious a quality, that she is loveliest when most earnest. They talk a good deal of Wales, and Herman is almost sentimental in his affectionate recollection of the scenery; as if Radnorshire had been the cradle of his infancy.

Mr. Hetheridge is not enthusiastic about the evening's entertainment.

"Yes, I've seen it," he says; "pretty theatre, very bright and lively, clever acting, and so on. Don't care much for the piece." Mrs. Williams frowns at him. "O, quite correct, you know, and all that, but not much in it; wants go; too classical for my taste."

"I am sorry I did not hit upon the exact style of thing you can appreciate," says Herman, with the air of a Mortlake market-gardener, who has been told that a predatory ass does not admire the flavour of his asparagus. "I'll try my best next time."

"What, is it your play?" exclaims Mr. Hetheridge.

"Didn't you know?" asks Editha, laughing at her admirer's confusion.

"No; I never look to see who writes the plays. I thought they were most of 'em sent over from France, and translated by clerks in Somerset House."

The Frivolity is looking its brightest when the two ladies and their escorts enter their box—Editha in palest gray silk, that shadowy tint she so much affects, with rare old lace ruffles, a crimson rose in her hair, and a loosely-tied crimson sash; altogether more like a portrait by Gainsborough than a fashionable young lady. She is delighted with the pretty little theatre, which contrasts pleasantly with the grandeur of Covent Garden, the only other playhouse she has seen.

She rests her round white arm, half veiled by the Malines ruffle, on the violet cushion, and fixes her eyes on the stage with that absorbed attention only known among provincial playgoers. The curtain has risen; she listens attentively; and Herman, standing behind her chair, feels as if all the audiences who have seen and applauded his play were as nothing compared with this one spectator.

Presently Mrs. Brandreth enters as Helena the slave. She slowly unveils, while the audience applaud, and those swift dark eyes of hers glance round the house. She sees Herman standing behind Editha's chair—sees him, and one little agitated movement of the hand which lifts her veil indicates that she has seen him.

She is at her best from that moment ; every nerve braced like those of the gladiator who knows that the greatness of Rome is watching him. More than once in the course of the play the keen dark eyes glance at Herman's box, and mark the fair freshness of the provincial beauty, the bright happy expression, so intent, so earnest, so curiously different from the faded languid look of a soul that has squandered its inheritance of joy.

"I never was like that," Myra says to herself. "I was too ambitious to be happy."

She looks back at her youth, and remembers that it was a restless desire for something better and brighter than youth's simple pleasures. Looks back, and remembers the days when Herman loved her, and when the glory of his love was nothing to her in the vivid light of those ambitious dreams. Fame has come to her, but love is lost. And now fame seems small and worthless measured against the infinite sweetness of that vanished love.

She stands at the wing—unseen, and gazes her fill at Editha. The nobility of the girl's face impresses her, just as it impressed Herman at the Eisteddfod. Who is she ? Some mere acquaintance of the hour, perhaps, to whom it is necessary for Herman to be civil. Yet how he bends over her chair ; what a tender look steals over his countenance as he stoops to hear her half-whispered praise of the acting or the play !

Myra Brandreth turns from the sight sick at heart. She has not yet taught herself to despair of winning him again, despite those calm deliberate words which pronounced the doom of a dead love. She trusts in the praises of others, an ever widening renown, new and striking achievements in her art, to charm the dead love to life. She will not admit to herself that she has failed. He is proud ; he is resentful ; but in his inmost heart the old love lives yet. The sight of this fair strange face has kindled a fire in her breast. She acts with a force which is new even to Herman.

"How natural, how wonderful she is !" whispers Editha, tears shining in her soft gray eyes.

"By Heaven she is a great creature !" exclaims Herman as the curtain falls. "She surpasses herself. She is all force and passion and feeling ; all fire and light. I feel as if I had been watching a disembodied spirit—genius divorced from clay."

CHAPTER X.

“Sul, il marchait tout nu dans cette mascarade
Qu'on appelle la vie, en y parlant tout haut.
Tel que la robe d'or du jeune Alcibiade,
Son orgueil indolent, du palais au ruisseau,
Trainait derrière lui comme un royal manteau.”

WEAKLY Mrs. Brandreth returns to the greenroom when the piece is over. Lord Earlswood is lounging against the chimney-piece, talking to a gentleman in evening dress with his opera-hat under his arm. His lordship has the privilege of admission to the greenroom of his own building, and takes upon himself the farther license of bringing a friend with him on occasions, a liberty which Mrs. Brandreth disapproves.

This gentleman in the faultless evening dress—lapels of coat and waistcoat in the very last fashion prescribed by Savile-row—with a pink diamond solitaire clasping his narrow collar, and no other jewelry whatsoever, is a man tolerably well known at the Frivolity and at other West-end theatres; a man whose entrance to the stalls is generally chronicled by the confidential whisper of his name among the well informed of the audience.

This gentleman is Hamilton Lyndhurst, stockbroker and millionaire; a man who has owned newspapers, and racehorses, and prize yachts, and a theatre or two, and a fashionable chapel, and a railway, and a diamond mine, and could, in a general way, buy up the nation, if that little lot were to come into the market; a man who, in the old imperial days of Rome's decadence, would have made a bid for the empire, and gilded his horses' oats and imported oysters from Britain, and diverted the course of the public aqueducts to water his gardens.

He is a large lazy-looking man, with a tendency to loll against any convenient angle, to lean over the back of a chair or attach himself diagonally to a mantelpiece, rather than sustain himself in an upright position of his own unaided strength. The young men at one of his clubs call him the Leaning Tower of Pisa. He has been handsome, is so still even, at five-and-forty, in a large and massive style. He is popular, and has numerous admirers—first, among the people who worship wealth; and next, among those who admire iniquity on a grandiose scale. Hamilton Lyndhurst rejoices in one of the worst reputations ever bestowed upon a man who has not actually outraged the criminal code of his country. How far he is worthy of his reputation, or how much better than his reputation, is a question that he alone

could answer, and, as he glories in his evil renown, it is a question likely to remain unanswered. He is no smooth-faced hypocrite, and has at least the merit of never having pretended to be virtuous. His theory is that there is no virtue in the world, except on the lips of those dependent wretches who cannot afford to avow their real sentiments; a Philistine crew, who keep up their pretence of righteousness as part of their stock in-trade, who practise the rites and ceremonies of a religion they secretly despise, and preach a code of morality against which their inward natures are in perpetual revolt. Religion, morality, domestic affection, manly honour, womanly virtue, are, in his mind, so many compromises which dependence makes with the world.

"If you could all get sixty per cent. for your money, we should hear less of church-going and the rest of your twaddle," he says with conviction.

He is unmarried, and his most intimate associates have never heard of any creature of his kin who depends upon him, or is aided or befriended by him. Brother or sister, nephew or niece, cousin or hanger-on, he has none. He is as solitary as Lucifer after his fall, and, as Lucifer, stands like a tower, and requires neither sympathy nor companionship. Even the parasites who hang upon the wealthy have no hold upon him. He gives breakfasts and dinners and suppers at his clubs or at public restaurants, and has his favourite companions, whom he changes almost as often as his gloves; passing the boon companion of last season with a careless nod this year, and hearing of an ancient crony's death with about as much emotion as the Regent Orleans displayed at the decease of his dear friend and tutor, Dubois. He is not unsocial in his habits, but his sociality is all out of doors. Within his gates his intimates have never passed. He has a house in the neighbourhood of Parson's-green; large, gloomy, shut in by high walls, bordering upon market-gardens, and in a region where autumn fogs are densest and linger longest. Wild are the imaginings with which active minds have indulged themselves about this house; its Oriental splendour, its more than Roman iniquity. Graphic and full of detail are the stories which are related of Saturnalia and Eleusinian mysteries held within those walls; but as none of the story-tellers have ever seen the marvels they describe so vividly, the basis of their statement is somewhat unsubstantial.

The butcher and the baker go in and out, with their neat little carts and clever ponies, as freely and cheerfully as to other houses; and if questioned about this modern temple of Eleusis, have no more to say than that Mr. Lyndhurst is quite the gentleman in the matter of paying his bills, and not "worritting about

a ticket with every blessed pound of steak, as some people calling themselves gentlefolks do."

Mr. Lyndhurst is more or less "in society;" that is to say, he is invited to a great many parties in the season, to which he goes or does not go, as the fancy of the moment prompts; but the *crème de la crème*, the *dessus du panier*, know very little of Mr. Lyndhurst, or only have him pointed out to them in the Park as a man who drives a seven-hundred-guinea pair of horses—chestnut steppers, seventeen hands high—and has made no end of money—somehow. Some of Mr. Lyndhurst's acquaintance call these bright chestnut beasts Shadrach and Meshach, because they look as if they had just come out of the burning fiery furnace which Nebuchadnezzar ordered for those offenders. Indeed, Mr. Lyndhurst and his horses have a somewhat diabolical look; and if Mephistopheles were permitted to drive a mail phaeton with brass-mounted harness, one could fancy his earthly semblance not unlike that of Hamilton Lyndhurst.

Country houses, and those social gatherings where a man becomes a domestic animal, unfolds himself, and reveals his idiosyncrasies, pleasing or unpleasing, Mr. Lyndhurst does not affect. He is never met hanging-up holly in ancient halls or kissing portly matrons under the mistletoe. Feminine society is his broadly-declared aversion, and except the one woman he happens to be pursuing for the time being—as Faust followed Gretchen, and without need of evil promptings from the embodied evil at Faust's elbow—the sex has no existence for him.

Yet although he avows his sentiments upon all subjects with a praiseworthy candour, and is proud to confess himself an infidel and a profligate, there are circles in which he is not only tolerated but welcomed; mothers who would give him one of their daughters to-morrow with a generous confidence in his latent nobility, and a pious belief in the time-honoured maxim that a reformed rake is the best of husbands.

Lord Earlswood and Hamilton Lyndhurst have been cronies for the last two or three seasons, and his lordship's downward career may be said to have taken its fatal dip during this time. Earlswood, the weaker vessel, finds much to admire in the splendid iniquity of his acquaintance. That utter casting-off of moral restraint, which Lyndhurst calls getting rid of prejudice and compromise, has a fascination for the feebler sinner. Lyndhurst has a knack of expressing himself which, with his own particular set, passes for wit. No masculine dinner-table is dull when he is seated at it; no smoking-room conversation lacks vivacity when he is present. Earlswood, who has very little to say for himself, and rarely starts an opinion, admires and

envies this gift of utterance. He likes, too, to associate with a man who is never likely to want anything from him, and the knowledge of Lyndhurst's wealth gives him a sense of security.

"A fellow who can be amusing without winding up by asking one to back his bill," says his lordship in praise of the stock-broker.

It was Lyndhurst who suggested the building of the Frivolity. Having originated the idea, he naturally considers the theatre open to him as an agreeable lounge. He affects not to see that his presence is unwelcome to Mrs. Brandreth; brings her bouquets and rare orchids and ferns for her Bloomsbury drawing-room—he has tried bracelets, but these have been rejected—and does his best to be on good terms with her; in return for which attention she is coldly civil to him.

"Where did Westray pick up that lovely girl with the red rose in her hair?" asks Mr. Lyndhurst, after he has shaken hands with Mrs. Brandreth, who sinks on the ottoman exhausted, and with an inward trembling, as of one who has passed through some ordeal of flesh and spirit bitter as the pains of death. It is Mr. Lyndhurst's manner to speak of women as if they were weeds growing by the wayside; a stray wild-flower here and there to be gathered for its prettiness or perfume, the rest left to unlamented decay.

"Don't know, I'm shaw," replies Lord Earlswood; "not a bad-looking girl."

"Not bad-looking! Why, man, she's superb. The handsomest woman I've seen for a year, with the usual exception in favour of present company," adds Mr. Lyndhurst, turning to Mrs. Brandreth with a smile which some experience of her sex has taught him to consider irresistible.

"Pray put me out of the question," says Myra coldly; "I belong to the past."

"Do you know that lady in the box, Mrs. Brandreth?"

"Not in the least. Some country cousin of Mr. Westray's, I should think, from her attention to the performance. Yet I never heard of any cousin of his."

"And you have known him long, I believe."

"We were children together."

"What does it matter who the lady is, Lyndhurst?" says Lord Earlswood. "Whoever she is, she is not your style."

"Who taught you to know my style?"

"Well—er—judging by the women I've seen you admire," falters his lordship, embarrassed by the curt inquiry.

"If I wear a rosebud in my coat to-day, is that any reason I should not prefer a lily of the valley to-morrow?" asks Hamilton

Lyndhurst. "With regard to the lady we saw to-night, I took particular notice of her simply because she is the handsomest woman I have seen for a long time, and I wondered how Mr. Westray came by her. My interest in the lady begins and ends at that point."

"You know Westray?" suggests Lord Earlswood.

"Yes, I meet him occasionally in society; and he belongs to one of my clubs—the Junior Thespians. Not a bad sort of fellow, but with an overweening opinion of himself."

"Literary men always have," remarks his lordship, with placid conviction. "That's how it is they never save money. They think their candle is going to burn for ever; and some day it goes out with a sudden puff, and leaves them paupers."

"As I happen to know Mr. Westray much better than either of you, permit me to say that he has not an exaggerated opinion of his own merits," observes Myra. "He is too much an artist to be conceited."

"Raffaelle was a very fair painter," remarks Hamilton Lyndhurst; "but tradition informs us that he was an ineffable snob."

"You had better be careful how you talk of Westray, Lyndhurst," says Lord Earlswood. "He is a favourite here."

"He has reason to be," replies Myra, gathering up the loose white cloak which she wears at the wing and rising to retire to her dressing-room, "for his talent has made your theatre."

"Pshaw! a mere adaptation, which a dozen men about London could have done as well as he."

"I don't think there are a dozen men who can write better than Emile Augier, and Mr. Westray's comedy is better than Augier's," answers Myra; and then bids the two gentlemen good-night with a final tone which means that they are not to linger in the hope of escorting her to her carriage.

"Considering the money you've spent upon this place, she's not particularly civil," observes Mr. Lyndhurst, as the door closes on Mrs. Brandreth. "Another woman would at least pretend to be grateful."

"I don't want pretences; and Mrs. Brandreth is not like other women," answers his lordship sulkily. "Are you coming to the club for a rubber?"

"No; I am due at two or three places. I forget half the parties I'm asked to; but I make a round now and then, just to see what's going on."

"I hate parties," says Lord Earlswood. "I think I shall go round and see the burlesque. I've seen it three-and-twenty times; but it rather improves on acquaintance; the jokes get a mellow flavour, and one knows when they're coming, which is

always an advantage. I believe that's why people like the *School for Scandal*; they know when they ought to laugh."

His lordship lets himself through his own particular door and into his own particular box; Hamilton Lyndhurst retires to the lobby to watch the departures, lying in wait for Mr. Westray's unknown beauty.

She comes at last, leaning on Herman's arm, tranquil as a cloudless summer morning, and with that happy look of an unshadowed life which strikes deep to the hearts of worldlings. They have to wait for the carriage, and Hamilton Lyndhurst seizes upon Herman and shakes hands with effusion.

"Where have you been hiding yourself, Westray? I haven't seen you for an age; and I want you to join my party for the Derby. You disappointed me last year, you know. Rather too bad!"

"What a delightful man!" thinks Mrs. Williams, awed by Mr. Lyndhurst's bulky splendour, his dark eyes, large pale face, and carefully-trained black whiskers.

"You're very kind. I can't pledge myself for the Derby yet a while. You'd better not keep a place for me."

"Mr. Murcum's carriage!" cries the waterman.

"Good-night."

Herman and his charge pass out through the swinging crimson doors, Mrs. Williams and Mr. Hetheridge follow, and Hamilton Lyndhurst has gained no more than a nearer view of the unknown beauty, and the knowledge that her name, or her people's name, is something that watermen can make into Murcum.

"Who is she?" he wonders. "Not his fiancée. They were on too ceremonious terms. Respectable, without doubt; rural respectability was written in every fold of the elder lady's garments. I saw the carriage—only a hired brougham; no mistaking the coachman's drab overcoat. Ergo, that lovely girl is a respectable nobody, whom Westray wants to marry. Quite out of my line, Earlswood says. I am not so sure about that. Upon my soul, I don't know but that such a girl as that might tempt me to give the lie to all my previous life, and go in for marriage and respectability; slip the cable of the past, open my house to society, and get a seat in Parliament. There may be worse turns of the wheel than that in the whirligig of life. I shouldn't object to respectability and the orthodox dinner-table—the pædium of British virtue—if I could find a woman handsome enough to make other men envious, and clever enough to keep me in good humour."

A little later, and Mrs. Brandreth sits before her dressing-table, looking at her haggard face in the glass. She has changed

her stage costume for a fawn-coloured cashmere gown, made with puritan simplicity ; she has washed off paint and powder and artistic darkening of the arched brows, and looks ten years older than the Helena of the play. Rigid and pale and drawn looks the small face, with its delicate sharply-cut features—a face that will age soon assuredly ; dark and gloomy is the fixed gaze of the large hazel eyes, staring into the dimly-lighted glass, and seeing nothing.

“ God keep him from loving any one else ! ” she whispers, as if to some listening spirit. “ My hatred would be fatal to her.”

CHAPTER XI.

“ Oftmals hab' ich geirrt und habe mich wieder gefunden,
Aber glücklicher nie ; nun ist diess Mädchen mein Glück !
Ist auch dieses ein Irrthum, so schont mich ihr klügeren Götter,
Und benehmt mir ihn erst drüben am kalten Gestad'.”

“ She did not weep,
But o'er her meek eyes came a happy mist,
Like that which kept the heart of Eden green
Before the useful trouble of the rain.”

IN most lives there comes an Indian summer. Five years ago Herman Westray's favourite complaint was that he had lived his life ; that dreams and desires and hope, and even ambition, had come to an end for him ; that he had no expectation of ever doing better work, or winning wider renown, or being in any wise better or happier for the passage of the coming years. To-day he feels as if life were beginning again, as if the gates of a new world had opened to him. In a word, he is in love—in love with a good woman, in whose faith and constancy he has no shadow of doubt.

Mr. Morcombe is very busy in one way and another, or affects to be very busy ; and is rarely to be found at Lima-crescent between breakfast and dinner—not often in the evening. Mrs. Williams does her best to encourage Vivian Hetheridge, whom she considers the proper person for Editha to marry ; but she does not discourage Herman Westray, from whom flows a perennial stream of theatre, concert, and picture-gallery tickets, and

whose society she infinitely prefers to the young Squire's rather heavy company. Vivian is apt to be sulky, and is fitful in his visits; now calling every day, and sitting for an hour or so gloomy as the statue in *Don Giovanni*; anon absenting himself for a week. Alas for unrequited love, it is ever at a disadvantage.

So Herman and Editha have their days and evenings very much to themselves; kindly pleasure-loving Mrs. Williams counting for so little. Dewrance calls once or twice a week, and sees victory in Herman's manner, and has a perfect understanding of all that is going on. He is not ill-natured, and, having long ago accepted his own defeat, beholds Herman's success without rancour.

"Be a kind and faithful husband to her, Westray," he says one night, when they leave Lima-crescent together, after an evening spent in talk and music, "and I shall never grudge you your happiness."

"Kind and faithful I will be to her to the end of life," answers Herman; "her faithful friend, her devoted servant, if she will give me no higher privilege. But it is rather too early for congratulations, my dear Dewrance. I am sure of myself, but not sure of her."

"I am," replies the Curate briefly.

"You think she likes me—a little."

"I think you are fools both; so blindly in love that you cannot see how ill-suited you are to each other; yet you made a strong point of that unfitness when we talked of Miss Mecombe of Llandrysak."

"That was before I loved her. Love makes one bold. You remember what Richard Steele said of his wife, 'To love her is a liberal education.' Love shall be my master, and teach me to be worthy of my mistress."

"And for your sake she will throw over as good a fellow as ever breathed, and one of the finest estates in Denbighshire."

"You mean Hetheridge?" says Herman indifferently. "Editha has too much mind to be happy with a member of the bovine family, a ruminating animal who never said a wise thing and never did a foolish one."

Not long after this conversation Vivian Hetheridge tempts evil fortune by declaring his love, dimly conscious of its hopelessness, but bent on telling his story, even to unwilling ears.

He has found Editha alone, Mrs. Williams having gone to buy bargains in the "Grove," otherwise Westbourne, which she regards as a "little heaven here below" in the way of millinery. He has surprised Editha at her piano in the back drawing-room,

brooding over one of Mendelssohn's dreamiest compositions, full of thought and perplexity as she plays. She has received a letter from Ruth this morning which has set her thinking.

"Sorry to disturb you at your practice, Editha," says Mr. Hetheridge, as they shake hands. They are friends of such long standing that he has acquired the right to use her Christian name.

"I was not practising, and you have not disturbed me, thanks. I was only thinking," replies Editha, going to the open window, where a screen of flowers shuts out a restricted view of yard, cistern, wall, and mews. Vivian follows her to the window, and they both give their attention to the geraniums.

"Not thinking about anything unpleasant, I hope. You were looking uncommonly serious when I came in."

"Was I? No, my thoughts were not unpleasant. I was only thinking that I had been away from home a long time, and that I ought to go back to Ruth."

"Poor Ruth! Yes, she'll miss you, won't she? Rather dull at the Priory for her when you are away, not being able to move about and take a pleasure in the stable, or the piggeries, or the poultry, or anything enlivening. She must miss you sadly."

Editha answers with a sigh, ashamed to know that, dearly as she loves her sister, it will cost her a pang to return to Lochwithian.

"Yes, she must miss you," repeats Mr. Hetheridge, with an unpleasant tendency to harp on one string; "and if you were to leave Lochwithian altogether, settle ever so far away—marry some professional or literary man, for instance, who would be obliged to spend the best part of his days in London—I should think it would break Ruth's heart."

Still no answer; Editha's face is hidden as she bends over the flower-pots, twisting and untwisting fragile sprays of maiden-hair.

"Editha, it would be a hard thing for Ruth if you were to desert her—a hard thing for all of us, who have loved you faithfully for years, if you were to leave us for the love of a stranger," says Vivian, rushing blindly to his doom; "hardest of all for me. You know how I have loved you ever since I knew the meaning of man's love for woman. Everybody who knows us knows my love. It has been part of myself; the best and brightest half of my nature. It will be while I live. Don't throw away the honest love of a lifetime for the sake of a stranger, Editha; a stranger who would part you from your own flesh and blood, from all those poor creatures about Lochwithian

who love you and depend on you; from the children you have taught, from the sick you have nursed, from the heathens you have made into Christians. Think of Ruth, think of all of us," putting himself very low down among the poor of Lochwithian, "and pause before you let Herman Westray tempt you away from your home."

"Who told you that Mr. Westray has asked me to leave my home?" exclaims Editha with a flash of anger. "He never has."

"What does it matter when the question comes? It will be asked. He will have no scruple in taking you away from all who love you. He will think his love of yesterday's growth good enough to set against all the devotion that has ever been given you. Do you think he will consider Ruth's loss, or your father's or mine, or all the people in Lochwithian parish? He wants you for himself. What are we that we should stand in his way?"

"Vivian, it is most unfair in you to talk like this."

"Is it? If I held my peace much longer, should I have the chance of speaking to you at all upon this one subject? A few days later, and you would strike me dumb at the outset by telling me that you were Westray's promised wife. I want to have my innings first, though I may know the game lost ever so long ago. Editha, if you would only consider what you lose in caring for that man! Your sweet home life, your power to do good, to reign over a larger parish than Lochwithian, yet live near enough to Lochwithian to continue to extend all the good works you have begun there, to make sunshine in the land. Marry me, and there need be no parting between you and Ruth. My home shall be her home, and may ruin light upon it if she is ever less than its most honoured inmate! Editha, I know Ruth likes me; I know that Ruth has been my friend always; and I think she would be glad to see my suit prosper."

Tears are in Editha's eyes as she raises them from that mute contemplation of the ferns and flowers.

"It is a pity we cannot command our hearts," she replies gently. "I know how good you are, how true, how unselfish, and I know how much my dear sister esteems you; but I cannot give you what you ask. I cannot, even to lead a calm and happy life near my dear old home, even for Ruth's sake, give you love for love. I would not give less than you offer me—a whole heart."

"If you had never seen Herman Westray—"

"If there had been no such person as Mr. Westray, my answer would have been the same."

"I don't believe it," cries Vivian angrily. "His coming changed you. He, a stranger, came between you and the love that had followed your footsteps since you were a child. Editha, think how little you know of him; how he can but give you at most a divided heart, putting the best part of himself into his books; dependent upon public favour; miserable, if newspapers withhold their praise. There can be no such thing as domestic peace with such a man as that; a man who writes plays, who hangs about the side scenes, and knows half the actresses in London. Is that a man to offer you an established home, a happy tranquil life? Be warned in time, Editha, for Ruth's sake, for mine, if not for your own. Give me half your heart, if you cannot give me all. Give me your pity, your toleration. I do not ask measure for measure; only let me love you and watch over your life, and the study of my days shall be to make you happy."

"You are too good, too generous to me, but most ungenerous to Mr. Westray, who has done you no wrong. I have tried for a long while to make you understand that there was no possibility of our ever being more to each other than we are to-day—I hope—true and loyal friends. It is not my fault if you have been blind to the truth, if you have cherished ideas which I have never sanctioned or encouraged. Let this be our first and last discussion of this kind, Vivian," she concludes with kindly firmness.

"Well, I think I knew my fate before I came here to-day," he says, after a little pause, pale with anger and grief, "but I was bent upon saying my say. I thank you for your plain speaking," with a little bitter laugh. "You have left no room for doubt. All is said—all is ended. The hope of my manhood goes down like a broken-backed ship at sea—all hands on board, nothing saved from the wreck. So be it, Editha. Heaven knows, if I feel this keenly, my pain is not altogether selfish. I am sorry for all of us—sorry for Ruth, sorry for your father, for the poor people at Lochwithian who love you—sorriest of all for you."

"I don't understand why you should compassionate me," she answers, stung by the conclusion of his speech.

"I daresay not. Love is notoriously blind. You will understand me too well in days to come. Good-bye, Editha." He offers his hand, looking at her with a piteous tenderness.

"Good-bye, Vivian. And O, if I have thoughtlessly given you pain, I most humbly beg you to forgive me."

"My dear, there can be no question of forgiveness between you and me. Your dog, if you flogged him, would crawl to your feet and fawn upon you half an hour afterwards. Think of me

as you think of your dog. I can take my punishment, and still be faithful; and if ever there shall come a day when you have need of my love, put it to the proof. You shall not find it wanting."

They shake hands and part; and Editha feels more pain than she has ever known before from any act of her own—suffers as she might suffer if she had hurt her horse or her dog, blindly-faithful creatures that worship her. Her conscience is racked with the thought that she might have saved Vivian this agony of to-day. She has tried her best to let him see the vanity of his hopes; but she is not the less remorseful, feeling that his pain must be in some measure her fault.

The next day is the 4th of June, Speech-day at Eton. Herman and the Curate have made an engagement with the two ladies to take them down to Windsor by rail, and show them the castle and park, the river and college, St. George's Chapel, and, in short, all the lions of the most delightful show-place in the world. These innocent Cambrians have never seen the mediæval pile, British royalty's only royal abode, nor the forest, nor Virginia Water, nor the schools which Henry VI. founded for deserving lads of humble condition.

They are to start directly after breakfast, arrive at Windsor by eleven o'clock, see castle and chapel, drive in the Forest and walk by the placid waters of Virginia, lunch at the Wheatsheaf, then back to Windsor, where Herman is to charter a wherry and row them up to Surly Hall. He proposes a dinner at the Castle or White Hart, but the ladies prefer returning to a German tea in Lima-crescent, and Herman is content to accept the German tea, looking forward to a friendly evening afterwards.

He wonders at himself a little on the morning of the 4th—a gracious June morning, with the balmy breath of summer sweetening the air, wonders that he, of all men, should be looking forward with delight to the prospect of escorting two country-bred females through the familiar glades of Windsor, or rowing them on gentle Thames, performing, in fact, all those functions which he has been wont to ascribe solely to the tame-cat species. "Love makes tame cats of the best of us," he says to himself apologetically. "Samson and Hercules, Pericles, Nero, all in the same boat. Dear Dewrance! How nice it is of him to lend himself to our pleasures, knowing, as he must know, that his portion will be Mrs. Williams!"

Happy morning in the fair June sunlight, which glorifies even the prosaic Paddington platform, with its labyrinthine lines going to all corners of the earth; its bewildering ticket-offices; its mountainous piles of luggage, and all-pervading porters rushing

at the unoffending traveller with trucks. Editha and Mrs. Williams meet the two gentlemen at the station; the elder lady glorious in silver-gray moire and a black-lace shawl; the younger in some simple straw-coloured fabric, pale and cool, and a rustic Dunstable hat, which might be what milliners call "trying" to a less perfect face.

Herman has secured a compartment—has taken the tickets. There is no bewilderment, no going astray upon platforms that lead to Milford Haven or Exeter. The bell rings, and anon they are gliding smoothly out of grimy London, away to the clover-scented meadows, to the winding river.

Dewrance is in his glory; a conscientious performance in the tame-cat line is always pleasing to him. He devotes himself to the duties of the day as seriously as if his future bishopric depended on his exact performance of them—as if a deanery in the immediate present hung on his faithful service. He explains to the ladies what they have to see and how they ought to see it; gives them a concise historical and archæological lecture about the castle, diversified by anecdotes of Charles II. and George IV., who seem to have fastened themselves on to the immortal fabric as barnacles upon some stately ship. He branches off upon an ecclesiastical line after this, and expounds the splendours of the chapel; but in the midst of his discourse contrives to point out all interesting or remarkable objects which they happen to pass, till a curve of the line brings them face to face with the towers and battlements of the Norman stronghold standing boldly out against a background of undulating wood, bright with summer's early green.

Herman has done nothing but sit in his corner and look at Editha all the time, and has been infinitely content. Once or twice she has stolen a little look at him, as much as to say, "Are you interested?" or, "I hope he is not boring you." But their eyes have met each time, and hers have been withdrawn in a gentle confusion, a shy surprise. O Love, seeing thy youth is so sweet, whence comes the bitter in thine after years?

They "do" the castle conscientiously—St. George's Chapel, the terrace above the slopes, where the finest seringas in England are breathing delicate odours to the noontide sun.

"Remind you of orange-blossoms, don't they?" says Dewrance to Editha, in his matter-of-fact voice. "Hope I may have the pleasure of officiating when you wear that kind of thing."

Herman leans over and plucks a sprig, an audacity which is high treason or *lèse-majesté*, no doubt, and gives it to Editha.

"Will you keep it till the day of orange-blossoms?" he asks; and as she takes the little flower their eyes meet, and that one long look is love's silent compact—a promise which it were perjury to break, an engagement which death alone could dissolve.

"The next thing to think about is a fly with a good horse," says Dewrance, who has been showing Mrs. Williams a monster gun, and explaining the process of firing the same. "We haven't too much time if you want to see Eton and the river after lunch. Virginia Water and the Forest will take two hours."

Thus, with agreeable briskness, startling the lovers from their day-dream, Mr. Dewrance leads them in triumph to the High-street, where he and Herman devote themselves to the study of horseflesh as ardently as if they were going to speculate in the purchase of one of those useful hacks which stand in patient rank in the shadow of the castle wall.

After a sharp scrutiny they select a straight-legged animal attached to a decent and roomy landau, and in this vehicle drive into the Long Walk, where the elms are in their early summer beauty, Dewrance still discoursing cheerfully, encouraged thereto by cousin Juliana, who hangs upon his words, and stimulates conversation with frequent exclamations and ejaculations, Editha and Herman sitting opposite each other, rapt in sweetest silence, the stolen sprig of *seringa* fastened on the girl's breast.

They are in the Forest, when their charioteer inquires with friendly solicitude whether they would not like to see the "rottendendrons." They will have to get out and walk a bit, he informs them, but it is a sight worth seeing—your flyman having a rooted preference for those sights which oblige his fare to leave the vehicle for an hour or so, whereby the flyman may put a nose-bag on his steed, and repose himself in the sun for a while, placidly idle.

"The *Rhododendron Walk*!" exclaims Dewrance; "of course, a thing you ought to see, and in perfection just now. Yes, coachman, you can stop for the *rhododendrons*."

They drive to a wooden gate—rustic, unpretending—alight, and enter a paradise of purple and green—a verdant alley between high walls of blossom. Birds are singing, bees humming; for the rest there is silence as in a world newly made, solitude as on the shores of the Amazon.

"How lovely!" exclaim the ladies simultaneously.

"Yes, it's pretty, isn't it? You don't get this kind of thing in Wales. This is royal; the bushes were planted by Queen Charlotte."

"What a pity they're all one colour!" says Mrs. Williams, who looks at rhododendrons as rhododendrons, and would like to see the last varieties of the nurseryman's culture in this century-old avenue.

"O Juliana, how can you find fault with anything so perfectly lovely!"

"My dear, if there were a few of those white ones, or the rose-coloured which we saw at Kew, interspersed, you know, it would certainly heighten the effect."

Mrs. Williams is a slow walker, and, in faithful attendance upon her, the Curate soon finds himself left ever so far behind by the other two, who wander on, and are out of sight before cousin Juliana has succeeded in distinguishing a squirrel, which Mr. Dewrance has politely pointed out to her, frisking in the wooded background which breaks upon them here and there through a gap in the rhododendrons.

Those others are out of ear-shot very soon, alone, as Adam and Eve in Paradise, and as forgetful of the rest of the world as if they had been verily the first of created human beings, and the mass of mankind an affair of the remote future. Herman's silence is over. They are together among the flowers, with the lark singing shrilly sweet aloft in the cloudless blue—alone as they have not been since the vaguest fancies grew to strongest love.

"Editha, you wear that flower for my sake. Does it mean that you will wear the orange-bloom for none but me? Answer yes, darling; for none but me—all unworthy of your love, but chosen because I love so well. Look at me, Editha—answer, sweet. My happiest thought in looking forward to this day was the thought that we might be alone for a little while. Our moments together are so brief."

She cannot answer him just yet. One little hand plays nervously with the spray of seringa, her eyelids droop over the soft gray eyes. He sees the dark lashes tremble on the rich bloom of her cheek before that lovely blush dies away and leaves her pale.

"Editha, are you angry with me for having dared to hope? I know I am not worthy of you, that I am your inferior in all that is highest and best in mind or heart. I have known that from the day we met—from that happy summer hour, nearly a year ago, when we sat on the margin of the fountain, and you talked to me of my profession with that sweet serious air of yours which made me think of Hypatia. But I love you, dear; and true love must stand for virtues that I have not. I will love and honour you all the days of my life, and my nature shall be

exalted by its union with yours. Dearest, you have the prettiest way of lecturing me sometimes; you inspire me with loftier desires, you elevate the mere thirst of success to a noble ambition. Love, will you take my life into your hands, be my teacher, my guide, the gentle ruler of my days and thoughts? That wide world wife includes all the rest. Will you be my wife, Editha?"

He has taken the hand that hung loose at her side—the hand that he longed so to take last year at Lochwithian—taken possession of it utterly, as if it were his own property.

"If I thought your life would be better or happier," she falters, only able to approach the awful question in a lateral direction.

"It will be—happier, better, brighter, and ever so much longer; for if you were to reject me I should make short work of the wretched remnant of my existence—squander it on riotous nights, burn it out in a blaze of gas; devote my days to billiards, my nights to tobacco, sleeplessness, and green tea. You mean yes, Editha. I shall see the waxen orange-flowers in your dark hair—worn for me—for me, the king of men on that glad day. Darling, you love me a little, you will bear with me a little? You will take me, faulty as I am—trust me with your young life, believe in me and in my future, which shall be bright for your dear sake, if labour and ambition can brighten it. Love, you are all my own—this trembling hand answers best."

His arm is around her, and she is drawn to his breast in the sweet summer solitude. Her head lies there for one blessed moment, while his lips seal their betrothal—the first masculine lips, save her father's, that have kissed her since she was a child—a kiss of sacred promise, never to be forgotten, sealing her for his own.

The contract being thus ratified, her next thought is of her sister.

"Ruth will be sorry," she says regretfully.

"Sorry that I have won you, my sweet? Can Ruth be so unkind?"

"Sorry for a marriage that will separate me from her. You must live in London always, must you not?"

"For a journalist and author who wishes to do the best for himself London is the only field. The Lake poets managed to write at three days' journey from the metropolis, but they did not make their fortunes. Southey would have been a rich man if he had lived in the Temple and written for the daily press."

"We must live in London then, Herman?" How sweet that plural pronoun to the lover's ear! "And Ruth will be alone at the Priory."

"Why should she live alone, if your society is essential to her happiness? Let her home be with us."

"Dear Herman, how good of you to propose it! But I do not think she would leave Lochwithian on any account."

"Then she loves Lochwithian more than she loves you, and as I love you better than all the world, I must have the better right to you."

"She may come and stay with us sometimes?" says Editha. It seems quite a natural thing to talk of their future already, though it is but a minute since love has spoken boldly.

"She shall have loving welcome, let her come when she may," replies Herman, careless of all things in this blissful moment.

They walk side by side between the rhododendrons, her hand drawn through his arm and held there, as if it were never to be released from that strong grasp. A backward glance shows him the Curate and Cousin Juliana, still afar, but in sight, warning him that there must be no farther demonstrations of victorious love.

"My darling, do you know that when first we met I was absolutely afraid of you? I can hardly believe, at this blessed moment, with this dear hand in mine, that you are really the young lady I came to see at Lochwithian—the serious young lady, sworn ally of the Church, a curate in petticoats, whom I approached with admiring awe, and in whom every touch of sweetness and womanliness was an exquisite surprise."

"Need a woman be less womanly for giving some thought to serious things, and for trying—ever so feebly at best—to do her duty?"

"Dearest, you have answered that question by your own example—she need not. The womanliest woman I know is she whose hand I hold. I know that I am not good enough for you, dear, but I no longer fear your goodness. Take my life into your hands, and make it better if you can—happier you cannot fail to make it."

Hereupon they slacken their pace, and let cousin Juliana overtake them, "scant of breath," like the Danish prince, and finding balmy June too much for her. So they leave the rhododendron Wood and drive on to Virginia Water, and wander—Herman and Editha always side by side—on the verdant margin of that placid lake, and hear the birds singing in the silent woods, and pour out sweet confessions of mutual feeling, telling each other how first, when first, tremulous as a new-fledged bird, the thrilling thought awoke in each breast that this was love. Dewrance, resigned, and bearing himself with the magnanimity of a Damon, sees and understands all, and bears the burden of cousin Juliana,

and orders the luncheon, and makes the salad, and charters the boat by and by, and secures a compartment for the return journey, and carves chickens and tongue, and hands teacups, and compounds claret-cup at the evening meal, and is altogether the best of fellows, as Herman tells him when they leave Lima-crescent, and walk beneath summer starshine to Bolivia-gardens.

"You're a dear fellow, Dewrance, a genuine thorough-going friend; and I feel as if I owe you in some sort the beginning of my happiness. It's all right, my dear boy, and I—well, I'm a great deal luckier than I deserve to be."

"As if I didn't know that! I thought you would bring matters to a crisis to-day. Curious, rather, that it should end so, after your very emphatic observations at Llandrysak; but I never knew a man protest his unfitness for any particular woman without his ending by falling in love with that very woman. No, I am not surprised; a little sorry, perhaps, knowing both of you pretty well, and seeing what you saw so clearly at the outset, the want of harmony in your lives."

"Cannot my life become better under her influence?"

"That's an open question. A man so self-contained as you is hardly a likely subject for a wife's influence. She may take the colour of her thoughts from you, but I doubt if she'll ever succeed in changing the colour of yours. Have you told her your opinions, by the way?"

"About what?"

"Upon the subject you have freely discussed with me; a trifle, and beside the question, perhaps, in your mind, but to her the one thing needful. Have you told her your estimate of Christianity?"

"I have asked her to be my wife, and she has answered yes," says Herman. "I did not accompany the question with a concise confession of faith, or want of faith—did not read myself in with the thirty-nine articles of my particular creed. I don't know what High-Church people may do under similar circumstances, or what you would expect from me."

"I think it would have been the act of an honest man to tell her the truth. Faith is her strong rock."

"I shall never assail its foundations. It is for your spiritual millionaire to make converts. The bankrupt in spiritual things asks no man to share his destitution."

* * * * *

Three days after the Windsor expedition the Squire returns to Lochwithian with his womankind; and before that return everything is arranged. Direfully disappointed at first that the son-in-law presented to him should be a literary adventurer instead

of a landed gentleman—slow to understand the promise of Herman's career, recognising but little advantage in present reputation or future glory—he is angry with cousin Juliana for her carelessness, with himself for his blindness, with Editha for her infatuation, and with Herman for his presumption. Reluctantly, finding Editha firm as rock, he gives way, and submits dolefully to Love's stern decree. It is hardly a relief to hear that Herman has saved a few thousands, or that he estimates his income roughly at two thousand per annum.

"Don't call it income, my dear fellow," says the Squire testily. "If you had the gout in your hand to-morrow, the income would stop."

"Not necessarily. I could dictate to a shorthand writer. One of Scott's best novels was dictated from a sick-bed."

"Pshaw! You may have softening of the brain, or the public humour may change—your novels prove a drug in the market. Call your present earnings what you please, Mr. Westray, so long as you don't call them income."

"So be it," replies Herman. "I am not afraid of the future with Editha for my wife."

"Whoever heard of a man being afraid of the future when he wants to get married!" exclaims Mr. Morcombe. "A lawyer's clerk will marry on sixty pounds a year without being afraid of the future, though the future may mean six hungry children. People never are afraid of the future when they want to indulge themselves in the present."

After much bemoaning about Vivian Hetheridge, whose ultimate union with Editha he has looked upon as a settled thing, the Squire gives his melancholy consent. Herman is to insure his life for three thousand pounds, and settle the policy on his wife, and Editha's two hundred a year is to be tied up as tightly as many-worded legal documents can tie it—to which conditions Herman agrees rejoicingly.

Happy interval between the day of betrothal and the sad hour of parting! Herman and Editha spend the greater part of those three days in unrestrained companionship, cousin Juliana looking on placidly, having taken her scolding meekly from the Squire, and being at heart devoted to the lovers. These three perambulate that Tyburnian suburb, with its endless labyrinth of streets and crescents and gardens and terraces, looking for that archetypal house in which the young couple are to set up their household gods, and enter upon the mystery of domestic life. They talk of it as lightly, both of them, as if it were a summer holiday, rather than the solemn thing it is, committing them to manifold responsibilities, opening the doors of a world full of

perils and pains and sorrows. Single, these two young lives are like a ship lying in harbour, safe from winds and waves; married, they will resemble the same ship far out at sea, tempest-tost, fighting the elements, with desperate odds against her.

They are not looking for the actual house in which they are to live, but only for the kind of house they will require—so that the choice may be simplified by and by. “It is much too soon for thinking about a house,” says Editha.

“Not at all too soon,” protests Herman. “What is there to delay our marriage? If you knew what an unsettled, purposeless being I shall be until our new life begins, you would not be so cruel as to protract my misery.”

“I want Ruth to get used to the idea of losing me,” replies Editha. “You can come to Lochwithian when your book is finished, you know.”

“That will not be before August. What do you say to our being married in September?”

“September in next year?”

“No, my fair tyrant, September next—the September for whose guns the innocent young partridges are fattening.”

“O, Herman, I must have one more Christmas at home. All the poor people look forward to Christmas.”

“Coals and blankets,” interjects Herman sceptically.

“And we have an evening for the school children—blind-man’s buff and a magic lantern; and Ruth’s sofa is carried down to the hall, and she gives away the clothing we have made in the autumn. I must have one more Christmas at Lochwithian, Herman.”

“You shall, darling. We will go down and spend Christmas there together, if your papa will have us; and you shall distribute the frocks and muffetees, and the children shall give three cheers for my bonny young bride, till the old rafters ring.”

He means to have his way, this happy lover, though he is content to say no more just yet. They roam up and down, looking at houses which bear a remarkable family resemblance to one another, the very cornices spouting out in the same architectural piccalili, a school of ornament which seems the result of a profound study of the cauliflower tribe. The mantelpieces look as if they had all been dug out of the same quarry, and chipped into shape by the same masons—mottled marble, like Castile soap, in the dining-rooms; statuary marble, with a little more of the cauliflower decoration, in the drawing-rooms. Papers alike—graining alike—general newness and tendency to shrinking in the woodwork alike.

Herman sighs despondently as they stand in the drawing-room of the sixteenth house, the afternoon sun glaring in upon them through three long plate-glass windows set flat in the wall.

"There's a sad want of individuality in your modern dwelling-house," he says. "Too windy for a house, too fine for a factory or a gaol. I haven't seen my ideal house yet, Editha. Have you?"

Editha owns that the Bayswater dwellings are uninteresting.

"My love, you would go mad in a vapid square box of this kind, after Lochwithian Priory. We must look farther afield."

"There is plenty of time, Herman."

"Yes, between this and September. How would you like to live by the water?"

Editha hasn't the least idea which water he means.

"On the banks of the Thames—by that river we were on the other day. There are some nice old places at Putney and Fulham and Chiswick—houses that people have lived and died in—not newly run-up packing cases smelling of damp mortar."

"Indeed, Herman, I should like to live wherever you would be happiest," replies Editha, a wife already in self-abnegation and submission; "and I think an old-fashioned cottage by that lovely river would be ever so much nicer than Bayswater, where the streets and terraces are so dreadfully long and straight."

Cousin Juliana suggests that water is generally damp, and that a river-side residence and rheumatism go together in her mind.

"Dear Juliana, we are only talking at random. There is plenty of time for Herman to change his mind again and again."

"Of course," says Herman; "but I shall explore Fulham and Chiswick the day after to-morrow, notwithstanding."

To-morrow is to see their parting—not a sad one, though it is pain to part for ever so brief a span. Herman promises to come to Lochwithian at the end of July. He will finish his book by that time. He means to work double tides—to dash off a new piece for the *Frivolity* in the intervals of his more serious labour. He feels infinite responsibilities upon him, but not as a burden—rather as an armour which must make him invincible in the fight.

"You can't imagine how light my work will seem to me, Editha, henceforward," he says, in those two brief moments which they have to themselves at the station. "I shall have my goal before me now. Until now I have had only an indefinite

spasmodic desire to get on, for my own sake—an ambition so utterly selfish that it seemed a vice rather than a virtue. Henceforward I labour for you. That thought will renew my strength. I shall work as well as I did years ago, when I knew my mother's comfort depended on my pen. I have given hostages to Fortune." And thus they kiss and part.

CHAPTER XII.

"We can be nothing to each other, and yet are too much to each other. . . . I will see thee no more. All I can say is mere folly. In future I shall see thee as men see the stars."

HERMAN is not false to his promise made at the railway-station. He works as he has seldom worked before; labours for long hours with a spring and a freshness in his work that make it light. Bright thoughts come to him unsought; the gold lies on the surface. It is as if some fairy sat beside him and breathed happy fancies into his mind. There is no grinding against the grain. His pen, swift as habit has made it, cannot keep pace with his fancy. And he knows that this new book—higher in design, simpler in treatment, than any other story of his—will be popular, let the *Censor* pronounce what judgment it may. The characters which have such a vigorous life for him will live for his readers. In his last effort there might have been too much labour, a studied simplicity, a too elaborate puritanism. In this story Fancy follows her own wayward will, Imagination is dominant over Art.

Herman has not availed himself of Mr. Lyndhurst's invitation for the Derby, Editha being in town at the time of the Epsom saturnalia, and all the races that were ever run being of no more account to her lover than a race of flies across the ceiling.

Dropping into the greenroom of the Frivolity one evening to discuss certain vague ideas for a new comedy with Myra—he never goes to her house now—Herman finds Mr. Lyndhurst leaning in his favourite attitude against the mantelpiece, talking to Miss Walters, the soubrette, who in the matter of slang is more than a match for him.

"Rather unfriendly of you to throw me over the other day,

Westray," says Mr. Lyndhurst, as they shake hands, while Miss Walters withdraws to the other end of the room, and contemplates her blue-satin hessians in the glass.

"It really wasn't an engagement, you know. I told you I was likely to be engaged elsewhere."

"Did you? I thought you were booked for my party. We had rather a jolly day. Earlswood was with us, and so-and-so, and so-and-so," running over a string of names; "just the right people for that kind of thing; and we wound up with a dinner at the Pandemos. However, perhaps our party on Thursday will be more in your line; small and select—Mrs. Brandreth and Earlswood, Miss Belormond and myself. Just room for you. We're going to post down. Will you come?"

Herman Westray hesitates. Hamilton Lyndhurst is of all men the one whose acquaintance he cares least to cultivate just now—the man he would least like to see a frequent guest in that home which is now his daydream. But he and Lyndhurst have been on friendly terms for the last five years; he has cultivated the man's society at odd times, regarding him as an interesting specimen amid the varieties of mankind; and, whatever his views for the future, he cannot well be uncivil to Mr. Lyndhurst in the present.

While he pauses, undecided, Mrs. Brandreth comes in, flushed and breathless after a powerful piece of declamation at the end of an act. The withdrawal of *Hemlock* has been followed by an adaptation of a play by Dumas, which has startled all Paris at the Gymnase; but which, with its motive cut clean away and its morality whitewashed, has been tortured into an invertebrate domestic drama, and has signally failed in its attempt to startle London. This piece having been unlucky—though prepared by an eminent hand—Mrs. Brandreth is desperately anxious to get a play from Herman.

"I have been asking Westray to join our party on Thursday," says Lyndhurst.

"And he has said yes, I hope," exclaims Myra. "How nice that will be! We can discuss your ideas for the new piece," she adds, turning radiantly to Herman.

"It will be against the interests of the new piece that I should take a day's holiday. I am working very closely just now."

"All the more reason that you should allow yourself a few hours' respite," says Myra.

Herman is doubtful. Those double tides have kept him close to his desk, and he has a very human desire for fresh air and sunshine, the lights and shadows on a breezy heath, the concourse of prosperous well-dressed mankind, a race on which fortunes

are won and lost. The racing year is getting old, and he has not seen one of the horses he hears men talk about at his club.

"If I could spare the day," he says, wavering.

"If you can! Why, you will work all the better afterwards!"

"I fear not. There must be something mechanical in my workmanship; for throw me out of gear, and it takes ever so long before the wheels go again. I am like one of those monster ironworks one reads of in the North, where it takes a week to get the fires lighted."

"Bank up your fires on Wednesday night, and you'll be ready for a vigorous start on Friday morning," says Lyndhurst. "If you are a mechanical writer, you should go to work like your brother-novelist Philpott, who writes eight folios every morning, neither more nor less, and leaves off at a hyphen rather than begin a ninth. That's the way to write novels."

"Do go," pleads Myra; and something in her tone brings back the old days when the lightest word from her would have been a command—that one happy summer time when her beauty and genius brightened the little world of home. She seems ten years younger to him just in this moment. Only for one moment. In the next the consciousness of all that has come and gone since those days flashes back upon him. Life is full of these brief waking trances—this catalepsy of memory.

"What can you want with me?" he asks. "You cannot have a more amusing companion than Lyndhurst, and Lord Earlswood is to be with you."

"I want to talk to you about a new piece. This *Hands, not Hearts*, is an abominable failure, although Paris is raving about it. I suppose it only proves the difference between Fargueil's power and mine."

"I think it only proves that when you take away the motive of a play, and alter the relations of the principal characters towards each other, you weaken it considerably; to say nothing of the discount to be allowed for the change from the brightest and most epigrammatic of languages to our lumpish Saxon."

"You'll come on Thursday?"

"Of course, if you make a point of it. I have rather a good idea for the end of the second act which I should like to talk over with you. I know your tact in the arrangement of situation. You'll be sure to give me some valuable hints."

His belief in her talent is unbounded. This unlucky adaptation has given new and striking proof of her power. She has borne the weight of the piece on her shoulders, and the scenes in which she appears have gone brilliantly, although the play has failed to draw money. It has been *un succès d'actrice*.

The Cup-day opens brilliantly—Queen's weather, as all the newspapers exclaim in chorus, dimly reminiscent of the day when Majesty adorned the Berkshire racecourse.

Herman feels that this brief pause in his busy life is worth having. Summer is so sweet a thing in this early stage, with all her freshness upon her, before the fruit has begun to ripen on old garden walls, before the scythe has slain the glory of long feathery grasses, or the song of nightingale has died in the twilight woodland.

Mr. Lyndhurst picks Mr. Westray up at his chambers at eleven o'clock, the last of the party. Mrs. Brandreth and Miss Belormond are in the capacious landau; Lord Earlswood and his confidential groom occupy the box; a basket swings behind; four horses and two blue-jacketed postillions astonish the bystanders.

Myra looks charming in a toilette which is of the simplest, yet has a picturesque grace that might do credit to Worth himself. The fabric of the dress is creamy-hued cambric, disposed in manifold plaitings; its only embellishment a broad sash of palest azure and a sprinkling of pale azure bows, like a flight of heaven-coloured butterflies. A soft cream-coloured felt hat—after Vandyke—with a long azure feather and massive silver buckle, completes Mrs. Brandreth's costume. Miss Belormond's brilliant mauve and white costume has cost three times as much; but Miss Belormond at best resembles an animated fashion-plate, while Myra looks as if she had stepped out of an old picture.

Miss Belormond is a young lady who has devoted herself to the drama chiefly because she is handsome, and is expected to make her mark speedily as the beautiful Miss Belormond; secondly, because she and her immediate friends imagine that what Mrs. Brandreth has done may be as easily achieved by any young woman of equal personal attractions. And Miss Belormond is much handsomer than Mrs. Brandreth. Her eyes are larger, her complexion finer, her mouth more nearly resembles Cupid's bow, her figure is infinitely superior to Myra's, which has little to recommend it except consummate grace. In a word, then, Miss Belormond's friends come to the conclusion that the young lady has nothing to do but go in and win. Love of dramatic art—liking even—she has none; she has never recited six lines of Shakespeare voluntarily in her life, or been moved by a play. But she can be taught, argue her friends; it is all an affair of tuition; and as Miss Belormond has discovered all at once that she is dying to make her *début* as Juliet in white satin and silver passementerie, she is eager to learn. So she is handed over to one of the dramatic grinders, and is taught the same tones, and turns of head and arm, and inflections and tremu-

losos, that have been ground into Miss Wilson and Miss Milson, Miss Stokes and Miss Noakes, and in due course turned out of hand a finished Juliet. Her parents are not wealthy enough to defray the charges of this training, or to supply the costly raiment in which Miss Belormond thinks it indispensable to appear at rehearsal, nor are they influential enough to procure that *début* for which the young lady pines; but she is happily endowed with a rich godfather, who seems to be a near relation of Cinderella's fairy sponsor, and this gentleman—gray-moustached and in the sugar-baking trade—kindly arranges everything, even to the neat single brougham which is indispensable to Miss Belormond's launch—without which, indeed, that trim-built vessel could scarcely be got off the stocks.

Bella Walters and the unbelieving of the Frivolity corps have wondered not a little that Mrs. Brandreth should engage so handsome a woman as "Belormond" to act with her; but to see the two together is to find the answer to the enigma. That handsome dolt, splendid in colouring, perfect in feature, but with no more soul or spontaneous vitality than if she had been made by Madame Tussaud, is the best foil that the electrical Myra could have devised for herself. The expressionless beauty of this dull creature gives point and piquancy to Myra's countenance, which is all expression. The lifeless perfection of one enhances the charm of the other, and Myra is never so enchanting as when her imperfections are contrasted with this faultless nullity.

The two women have not a thought in common, Miss Belormond's mind seldom soaring above the contemplation of a new dress or the expectation of a little dinner. They rarely meet outside the theatre, and Miss Belormond's experiences at rehearsal have inspired a wholesome fear of her manageress. Myra's polished sarcasms sting her like the cut of a lash, and she has more than once hinted to the fairy godfather that she will never know real bliss until she has a theatre of her own, and actresses of her own to sneer at, as Mrs. Brandreth sneers at her—remarks which the fairy godfather allows to pass him by like the idle wind.

Miss Belormond therefore, aware that this companionship of to-day is a condescension on Mrs. Brandreth's part, is on her best behaviour, and is for the most part content to simper and say nothing. There is a drop of bitter mingled with her cup of sweetness, in the fact that she has accepted Mr. Lyndhurst's invitation without the consent or knowledge of that benevolent godfather; nay, that she has been guilty of overt deception in informing her estimable sponsor that she is going to spend the day with her aunt Drayson, at Nightingale-terrace, New Cross.

Mr. Lyndhurst is tired of the vapid beauty already, though he has not been a quarter of an hour in her society.

"I wish I'd asked Bella Walters," he says to himself; "there's more fun in that cock-nosed little puss than in a regiment of Belormonds."

Herman, who has seen Miss Belormond about the theatre, and noticed her about as much as he would have noticed any other handsome piece of furniture, greets her politely, but wonders not a little what she and Myra do in the same galley, outside the theatre. He does not know that this business of to-day is one of love's many meannesses. Myra, who now so seldom sees him, lowers herself to doubtful company for the sake of being for a few hours with him. Had he refused Mr. Lyndhurst's invitation, she would have found an excuse for staying at home on the Cup-day.

He is here, and she is all life and brightness, ready to talk of anything or everything. There is a worldly flavour in her talk—a spice of lemon and cayenne—which is refreshing from its novelty. With Editha he has been always in the skies, her world not being his world, nor her thoughts his thoughts. Even in talking of literature Myra has the advantage over the well-read country maiden; for Myra reads only the books of the day—books whose titles are on all men's lips—and always contrives to read them while they are fresh. The last argumentative battering-ram brought to bear upon the citadel of Christian faith, the last French novel with its apotheosis of feminine infidelity, are alike familiar to her. She can talk of the gravest themes or the lightest, and has something trenchant or sparkling to say of all.

Herman feels like a man who, after riding some quiet cob for a while, returns to the lively thoroughbred he rode before, and, as the pace increases, experiences a new sense of rapture and feels a forgotten power come back to him. This worldly talk is passing pleasant—pleasanter, perhaps, for the rattling pace of the carriage as it skims along the broad high-road, with its endless line of prim suburban villas, fringed with young limes and slim pink hawthorns and mop-shaped young trees of tenderest green, all after the same pattern; pleasanter, perhaps, because of the bright and varying face opposite him, smiling under the soft shadow of the Vandyke hat. Lyndhurst, tired of listening, tries to develop the conversational powers of Miss Belormond, who says, "That they *do*," and "That he *does*," when she is emphatically affirmative, and "Not a bit of it," when negative. Earlswood sits on the box and converses with his groom, who has come to look after the postillions and make himself generally useful. His lordship is serious and meditative, as becoms a man whose losses or gains between this and sundown must be considerable.

"I hope I've done right in putting the pot on about Golden Fleece," he says dubiously.

"Couldn't do better, my lord, after the information we had from—hum—hum—" replies the groom, dropping his voice to a confidential mumble.

They arrive on the heath just when the crowd is thickest, and before ascending to Mr. Lyndhurst's box, stroll up and down the lawn for a little, Herman and Mrs. Brandreth interchanging greetings with a good many people, Miss Belormond stared at freely, but not finding many of her acquaintance in these favoured regions.

Somehow—Herman can hardly tell how it has come about—Myra and he are more intimate to-day than they have ever been since their period of juvenile folly at Colehaven. He has given her his arm to steer her through the crowd, and the tapering hand, in a glove which in texture and colour resembles the petal of a tea-rose, rests confidently upon his sleeve, so confidently that he is fain to press it gently once or twice when the crowd is densest. Her talk is full of life and freshness—freshness as of Cliquot just uncorked rather than of forest rill. She criticises the people they pass, utters scathing cynicisms—borrowed from the *Scourge* or the *Censor*—with a delicious placidity, and contrives to interest her companion so completely that he is in no hurry to ascend to the box, whence Miss Belormond and Hamilton Lyndhurst are already raking the crowd with huge race-glasses. Earlswood is there too, and his smaller glass follows that pair below, with two angry eyes behind it.

Does Herman forget Editha on this sunlit Cup-day, amidst odours of Ess Bouquet, and rustle of silk, and flutter of laces and muslins, and raucous cries of "Ten to one on the field"? Well, no; his state of mind is hardly forgetfulness, but rather a calm severance from Editha and that portion of his life which belongs to her. He is a young man capable of leading two distinct lives—half a dozen distinct lives if they offered themselves to him with sufficient attractiveness—of playing Odysseus abroad or Odysseus at home as occasion served. If fate throw him into Circe's or Calypso's company, he will enjoy himself reasonably, but be not the less faithful to Penelope when he returns to the halls of Ithaca. He sees no harm in making himself pleasant to Myra to-day, especially after his categorical declaration of limited liability in the way of friendship. Of his engagement and approaching marriage he has said not a word; these are subjects too sacred to be talked about on racecourses or in greenrooms. The topics he discusses to-day are light as thistle-down, and, like thistle-down, float away and are forgotten. Yet

perchance even this careless talk of to-day carries the germ of fertility with it, like that feathery seed, and will crop up somehow in days to come.

They go up to the box at last, where Miss Belormond, having stared at the women's dresses to satiety, is yawning behind her race-glass, and wondering whether the fairy godfather has quite accepted that fiction about aunt Drayson, and wishing that some one would propose an adjournment to lobster salad and moselle, or chicken sandwich and champagne.

This desired diversion comes almost immediately from Hamilton Lyndhurst, who is eager to escort the ladies to the refreshment-room, or to Mr. Vyne Hendler's private tent, where the initiated are being hospitably entertained all day long, and where royalty is supposed mostly to congregate.

Miss Belormond rises briskly at the first bidding, having retained her primitive simplicity in the matter of appetite. Mrs. Brandreth refuses to stir.

"Do you suppose I am going to allow myself to be trampled upon by a famishing crowd for the sake of a sandwich?" she asks. "If you like to send me some claret-cup and a biscuit, I will take it here. Mr. Westray is going to tell me about his comedy."

Miss Belormond departs on Hamilton's arm, with an awful feeling that the fairy godfather must hear of this somehow, and that her brougham and her silk dresses will be spirited away like Cinderella's finery at the stroke of twelve; but the present delight of being jostled in a well-dressed crowd, having sweet nothings murmured to her ear in Mr. Lyndhurst's legato baritone, and consuming lobster mayonnaise and champagne-cup—wholesome mixture!—outweighs that vague dread, and the fair Belormond, not having room in her brain for composite emotion, is happy. Lord Earlswood has gone down to talk to the bookmen, so Herman and Myra have the box to themselves. She sits with one arm resting listlessly upon the velvet cushion, her profile towards the crown, and with about as much thought of the purpose of the meeting as if she had been at church. He sits with his back to the crowd and his chair tilted on its hind legs, thoughtful even to absent-mindedness.

"Do you remember the races at Tipsbury, the day papa drove us over in Mr. Sanderson's dog-cart?" asks Myra. "What a delicious autumn day it was, and what lovely country—a stretch of common on the crest of a hill—and woods, woods woods on every side, and the great blue sea shining at us through a break in the foliage! And what a simple-minded rustic meeting, half a race and half a fair! Do you remember, Herman?"

"No," he answers, curt to incivility ; "I remember nothing. I drowned my memory ever so many years ago in the waters of Lethe. I know that there is a hamlet called Tipsbury on the ordnance-map, but I know no more."

"What a nice thing that Lethe must be !" retorts Myra, coiling up, as the Americans say. "I wish they would import the water, like Apollinaris. Many people I know seem to wash out their memories with soda-and-brandy. I fancy that is the modern Lethe. Now let us be business-like, and talk of our comedy."

It is something to be able to say "our," even of this child of his brain ; something that she can give form and life to the creations of his fancy ; something to help him by a suggestion, to direct him by her taste, which is faultless in all the details of dramatic art, from the turn of an epigram to the length of a ballet-dancer's petticoat. They talk drama for the next half hour vigorously, and Myra helps her author by more than one subtle suggestion, shows him where his scaffolding is weak, and how the climax of an act may be intensified. In his gratitude he admires her almost as much as that innocent Myra of years gone by who acted the sleeping scene in *Macbeth* in the children's parlour at Colehaven Vicarage.

The race for the Cup comes on at last, after a good many races, which seem slightly uninteresting to the masses, though the cause of maddest bawling and convulsive throes, as of Dionysian possession, to the bookmen. Now every one is, or pretends to be, interested ; every glass follows the favourite in the preliminary canter, which some eager spirits mistake for the race itself. Miss Belormond has backed the favourite, and is to win gloves. Mrs. Brandreth has haughtily refused to speculate in any manner.

Very far away from that crowded racecourse are Myra's thoughts, even while the horses are sweeping past, as if driven before the blast of a hurricane, and the voices below are clamouring loudest. She is thinking of Colehaven and the days that are gone—the careless days, brimful of happiness, when Herman was hers. Perhaps it is that sweet time of youth she regrets almost as much as her lost lover ; perhaps she exaggerates that vanished happiness, and takes it for something better than it was, being so utterly gone. However this may be, regret is bitter. She sits beside her sometime lover, and knows herself as far from him as if they had the Southern Sea between them. And yet to-day her mind is fluttered with faint hopes. He has seemed happy, amused, interested. Her power to charm him may not be quite lost even yet.

They leave the course immediately after the great race, Myra and Miss Belormond being due on the stage at half-past eight; and a twenty-eight mile drive being no trifle, even with fresh horses at Hounslow. Throughout that homeward drive Mrs. Brandreth is bright and animated as when they journeyed by the same road in the morning. She has put the past and future out of her mind, and thinks only of being agreeable in the present. She has an instinctive consciousness that sentiment will avail her nothing with Herman. His assailable side is worldly: æsthetic, artistic perhaps, but assuredly not romantic. She lays about her at her will with that reckless wit of hers—a mere effervescence of the moment, and hardly worth remembrance, but sharp enough to be refreshing to jaded spirits. Lord Earlswood, who has exchanged places with Lyndhurst for the return, is in raptures.

"I can't think where you get your ideas," he exclaims; "they are so far-fetched, yet they seem to come to you so naturally."

"They grow wild, like other weeds," replies Myra. "I keep no intellectual forcing pit."

"Most people's clever hits are grown under glass," says Earlswood, quick to take up anybody else's notion. "Their sharpness is like the acidity of untimely peaches."

Miss Belormond thinks her companions might as well talk French at once—it would hardly be ruder to employ that unknown tongue than to discourse in a jargon like this, which, for all she knows, may veil some sarcastic allusions to herself. This young lady, who has graduated at a Peckham day-school, is apt to be afflicted with an uneasy suspicion of educated people. She, indeed, half believes that education is another name for refined malice.

It is only seven o'clock when they reach Hyde Park-corner.

"Come to my rooms and have tea," says Herman, who has a feeling that this holiday of his cannot last too long.

"O, how nice that would be!" exclaims Miss Belormond, who has brightened a little under the influence of a few civil speeches from Lord Earlswood. "I never feel fit for anything if I go without my cup of tea."

"You shall have your cup of tea, Miss Belormond. You'll stop, won't you, Myra? You can spare half an hour."

Rarely of late has he called her Myra. The shining hazel eyes look at him dreamily for a moment or so before she answers.

"Half an hour, and ten minutes more to drive to the theatre; that will leave us nearly an hour to dress. Yes, I think we could manage it; couldn't we, Belormond?"

Belormond is sure it can be managed. She has a wonderful

idea of Mr. Westray—a vague notion that an author is a compendium of everybody else's cleverness, and that this particular author is always inwardly laughing at her. She is grateful for any civility from him, and is curious to know what kind of place an author lives in. She had supposed the abode of the species to be mostly in garrets, when not in the Queen's Bench, and has been not a little surprised at discovering that Herman inhabits Piccadilly.

Myra, too, has a gentle curiosity about Herman's lodgings. How well she remembers his room at the Vicarage!—room which she has coyly peeped into over her sister's shoulder when the proprietor of the chamber was out of the way. Such a narrow den! a mere slip off another room, meant for a dressing closet, but used as a study! A shelf or two of shabby books—the father's college books handed down to the son—a battered old desk by the open window, a bunch of honeysuckle and roses in a brown jar on the window-sill, pipes, gun, fishing-rod, foils, and single-sticks in a conglomerated heap in the corner, and a collection of Tenniel's cartoons watered against the faded paper.

The landau pulls up before the door of a tall house facing the Green Park, and Herman hands the ladies to the pavement. His latch-key opens the door, and they go up a great many stairs.

"He does live in a garret after all," thinks Belormond, pleased with her own sagacity.

Herman stops on the second-floor landing, however, and opens the door of a large airy room, with a bay window and a wide substantial balcony—such a balcony to smoke and muse in upon warm summer nights, with a glimpse of minster and senate-house yonder across the tree-tops to inspire the ambitious dreamer.

It is a large room, simply furnished; not lined with books from floor to ceiling, for Westray is too much a man of the world to be a book collector. There is a bookcase on either side of the fireplace—one containing books of reference only, the other just those choicest of the world's classics, to know which is to have skimmed the cream of the human intellect.

The writing-table occupies the centre of the room, and is large enough for a solicitor in full practice. A capacious sofa, half a dozen delightful arm-chairs, various in shape, age, and material, a Sutherland table, and a handy-looking sideboard and cellaret, complete the furniture of this apartment, which is study and living-room in one. Some fine photographs of Gérôme's pictures adorn the walls.

"Quite a bachelor's tent," says Myra. "Looks as if it could be lifted easily."

Herman orders tea instantly.

"I daresay the kettle's off the boil," says Miss Belormond. "It's so difficult to get boiling water in lodgings; at least I find it so, though I pay three guineas a week and extras. They're quite put out if I want a cup of tea promiscuously."

"You should get them into better training, Miss Belormond," retorts Herman. "I'm always demanding promiscuous cups of tea, and the slavey is as brisk as Aladdin's genius."

The slavey, a sedate-looking housemaid of thirty odd, justifies his praise by appearing promptly with tea-tray and urn, and all appliances to boot—London cream, strawberries, pound-cake, wafer biscuits from the adjacent confectioner's. The Sutherland table is drawn into the bay, and they sit down to tea, Myra in the post of honour. Herman remembers that afternoon tea at Lochwithian with a rather guilty feeling; yet there can be very little harm, if any, in showing this small civility to an old friend.

The half-hour goes very quickly, and then Herman puts the ladies back into the carriage, shakes hands with both, and strolls off with Lyndhurst to dine at the Agora.

"Wonderfully fascinating woman, Mrs. Brandreth," says Lyndhurst. "You're a lucky fellow, Westray."

"Lucky because Mrs. Brandreth is fascinating? that's a *non sequitur*."

"But you don't mean to say that—that there isn't some understanding—that you are not going to marry her?" blurts out Lyndhurst, with his charming candour. "Somebody told me quite a romantic story: that you were engaged years ago, before she married Brandreth, and that when you met afterwards, you both discovered that you had never ceased to care for each other, and so on—the sort of thing they put into novels."

"It is the misfortune of such a position as Mrs. Brandreth's that the world is inventive, and that when a lady's life happens to be particularly uneventful, people's imaginations supply the void with plausible fiction. Mrs. Brandreth to me is simply Mrs. Brandreth; a very charming woman, whose talents I admire, whose force of character I respect."

"But you're not engaged to her? Well, that's curious; I thought it was an established fact. Certainly Earlswood has contrived to get her a good deal talked about; but we, who are in a manner behind the scenes, know there's nothing in that."

"I consider Mrs. Brandreth a woman of perfectly undamaged reputation," replies Herman, "if that's what you mean. It merely happens that she and I are friends, and not lovers. If I had any warmer feeling for her than friendship, there is

nothing in her past or her present life that would urge me to stifle it."

"That's very generously expressed," says Lyndhurst. "You fellows who write books have such a knack of turning a sentence. O, by the way, who was that charming young lady I met you with at the Frivolity a month or two ago—a tall girl, dignified, indeed rather haughty-looking, but with a sort of rustic freshness about her?"

"That young lady is Miss Morcombe, the daughter of a Welsh gentleman."

"Welsh! Dear me; I thought they wore conical hats and short petticoats."

"I believe some of the peasantry do indulge in those eccentricities, but not in the neighbourhood of Mr. Morcombe's estate."

"So," thought Lyndhurst, "Mr. Morcombe is a landed gentleman, and that lovely girl has money. Artful card this Westray."

They dine together generously, and Herman, going back to his chambers, late at night, feels that he has wasted his day, or, in his own stronger language, "given a day to Belial."

CHAPTER XIII.

"She is mine own;
And I as rich in having such a Jewel,
As twenty seas, if all their sand were pearl,
The water nectar, and the rocks pure gold."

HERMAN goes house-hunting soon after that Ascot Cup-day, goes in search of the nest that is to shelter his tender dove by and by. He explores Chiswick—dear little humble unpretentious Chiswick, which is old still while all the rest of the world is new—but Chiswick being limited in its capacities, and having its nicest nooks and corners filled, does not offer him just that dainty little water-side villa he desires to find; so he harks back to Fulham, and there, not far from Putney bridge, discovers a modest dwelling, with a narrow lawn sloping to the Thames; a house once occupied by a famous wit, and which seems to him the better for the association, though the wit's life was but a marred and broken existence at best.

The house is not especially convenient or well built, but the drawing-room and two rooms over, which will do for bedroom and boudoir, Herman thinks are pretty. There are windows opening on the lawn, a verandah, a balcony above—all those adjuncts which a man looks for, when he ought to be examining the kitchen range and inquiring if there is a copper. Herman is pleased, and, lest the chance should slip through his fingers, takes the house on a repairing lease without delay, his tenancy to begin from the midsummer quarter.

This important step taken, he engages an ancient female of the charwoman species to take charge of the house, and goes forthwith to Messrs. Molding and Korness, an expensive and fashionable firm of decorators and upholsterers, and gives them *carte-blanche* to make his house perfect after its kind.

"I don't want expensive decoration or furniture," he says, thinking himself passing prudent the while. "Let everything be of the simplest, but in exquisite taste. As taste is your business I shall not interfere unnecessarily. Let the prevailing tone of the drawing-room be white and pale sea-green," he adds, remembering Ruth's room at Lochwithian.

The upholsterer's man bows and smiles, and ventures to hope he shall give satisfaction.

"Perhaps you would like to look round, sir, with a view to making your own selection," says the man; "all our goods are marked in plain figures;" as if that made them cheaper.

Herman acquiesces, and perambulates a thicket of chairs, and then a forest of Arabian beds, and then a city of dining-tables, and a necropolis of wardrobes, all like family tombs.

"Dear me, how uninteresting furniture looks when it comes to be classified!" he exclaims. "I don't feel capable of choosing anything. I think I'll send you a rough drawing of the style of room I like, and you can carry it out in your own way."

The upholsterer is charmed with the suggestion. He sees his way to something rather expensive in the way of joinery.

To a lady's cabriole lounging chair, in ebonised wood, made after your own design	£16 16 0
To a gentleman's Etruscan do. do., cabriole legs, also made to own design	17 17 0

This is the kind of entry which presents itself to the upholsterer's mental vision as he bows his customer out. Herman thinks of his loose thousands, and resolves that his darling's nest shall be as bright as taste and money can make it. She shall not be made to feel that she has wasted herself on a pauper, or that

she has lost too much in refusing Vivian Hetheridge's wealth and status.

He writes to tell her that "our house" is taken, and that he will come to Lochwithian next week if he may. He turns his back upon London one fair July morning, gladly as a boy let loose from school. He has sent Myra Brandreth the first two acts of a comedy, but has not seen her since the Cup-day, and he reserves the final act and the conclusion of his novel as work to be done in the tranquil atmosphere of Lochwithian. He will have his working hours there, he thinks; an hour or two between breakfast and luncheon sometimes, an hour or two stolen from the night.

How sweet the hills and valleys seem to him, when Shrewsbury is left behind, and the placid fertility of Midland landscape gives place to romantic Wales—wooded hills, winding streams, dry some of them in this peerless summer time, one but a bare bed of bleached pebbles gleaming whitely athwart brushwood and saplings! He remembers the last time he travelled by this single line, piercing its iron way through the cloven heart of the hills, and always ascending at a very palpable elevation, till the air blows fresher and keener, and he seems to enter a purer world. He was going back to London smoke and London worldliness on that occasion, going downwards, and Editha Morcombe was no more to him than a lovely and noble-minded woman, utterly remote from his life.

Just in the sultriest hour of the sultry day the train, reduced to half a dozen carriages of Tenbyites, slackens its pace, and comes slowly past the sprinkling of labouring men's cottages and smart modern villas which forms the outskirts of Llandrysak. There is the little station—refreshment-room, book-stall, all *en règle*; the two brisk porters, ready to carry your luggage to the loftiest eerie among the surrounding hills; the placid station-master, who looks as if he had never heard of a railway accident; and last, not least, the entire population of Llandrysak turned out to witness the arrival of the train. There they sit in an awe-inspiring row, as many at least as the benches will accommodate, the rest standing, and all glaring at the newcomers.

Herman regards these aborigines no more than if they had been so many rows of cabbages in the station-master's garden, for yonder above the boundary of the station he sees a sociable and pair, with a clerical gentleman sitting in front with the coachman, and a lady seated behind; a lady who smiles at him from under the shade of an Indian silk umbrella, a lady to whom his heart goes forth with a glad bound.

The clerical gentleman, scrambling down as the train stops, reveals the features of Mr. Petherick, the incumbent of Lochwithian, and is on the platform by the time Herman has alighted, ready to help in looking after the luggage. A large portmanteau, dressing-bag, and despatch-box are speedily selected from the varieties of property disgorged by the van, and hoisted into the front of the sociable, filling the space lately occupied by Mr. Petherick. Herman leaves that amiable parson the entire responsibility of the luggage, while he hurries to Editha, and clasps the dear hand, almost too deeply moved for speech. Forgotten in that moment every thought or hope that is not of her or for her. How lovely the scene appears to him—the circle of hills, the warmth and glow of the summer afternoon, the distant farm-houses here and there, white against the green, the utter peacefulness of all things around him! The quiet of the landscape steals into his breast like balm, and as he takes his place beside Editha he has that reposeful bliss which comes to us sometimes in a happy dream—some vision in which the dead return and the days of our youth are renewed.

"Perhaps it would be better to put the portmanteau behind, Editha, if you don't mind it," says the brisk voice of Mr. Petherick, who feels that he may be rather in the way should he intrude his earthly presence upon these two dreamers. Editha looks up at him with a gentle smile of unconsciousness, not in the least aware what he means, just at this particular moment having lost the understanding of her mother tongue save when spoken by Herman. So Mr. Petherick shunts the portmanteau from the box to the body of the sociable, and resumes his seat by the coachman, leaving Herman and Editha alone in their paradise.

"How good of you to meet me!" exclaims Herman.

"How good of you to come ever so much earlier than you promised!" responds Editha; after which original remarks they lapse into fatuous silence for some moments, contemplating each other's faces as the sociable rolls past the outskirts of Llandrysak, and crosses a wide expanse of common where the furze bushes outline the Field of Cloth-of-gold, and tiny pools of water gleam like jewels in the sun. The lark sings high above them, carolling as for very gladness at their reunion.

"How pleased Nature seems to see us together again!" says Herman, with a happy laugh. "There seems a note wanting in the harmony of the universe when we two are parted."

"Do you really mean that you have been so foolish as to take a house, Herman, or was that part of your letter a joke?"

"A joke for which I am to pay a hundred and twenty pounds

a year, love, to say nothing of taxes—a joke which Molding and Korness, of Oxford-street, are going to furnish. It will be ready by our wedding-day in September, so if we get tired of Switzerland sooner than we suppose we shall, our home will be swept and garnished for our reception."

"Our home! how strange that sounds, Herman!"

"Sweeter than strange, dear."

"But you talk of our wedding as if it were settled for September."

"Isn't it? I thought we came to that understanding."

"No, indeed; I was to have at least a year at home with Ruth—time enough for her to accustom herself to the idea of our separation."

"There is to be no such thing as separation. You and I will often run down to Lochwithian for a week or two, if your father will allow us."

"As if papa would not be glad to have us!"

"And your sister can come to us at least twice a year. Traveling is made easy nowadays, even for an invalid."

"Ruth has been so good!" exclaims Editha.

In this first half-hour of reunion they are both inclined to be discursive, not finishing up one subject thoroughly, but starting off at a tangent every now and then.

"How good, dearest?"

"Why, dear, just at first the thought of our engagement made her rather unhappy. She is so much attached to Mr. Hetheridge, and you, of course, are a comparative stranger. She asked me so many questions about you, Herman—your principles, your ideas upon serious subjects—questions I hardly knew how to answer. We seem so seldom to have talked seriously."

"My love, we are not a convocation of Churchmen, or a Quakers' meeting, or an assembly of Scottish Presbyterians. What would you have us talk about but ourselves and our own happiness?"

"But I told her how good you are, Herman—how full of noble ambition and refined feelings; and then that last book of yours—that quite won her heart. So, little by little, she grew reconciled to the idea of our marriage."

"What ineffable goodness!" cries Herman, somewhat piqued

It is not pleasant to be received with stinted welcome, even into the best of families.

"O Herman, how unkindly you say that! You must not speak of Ruth with a sneer if you love me."

"If I love you, little one!" he echoes tenderly, drawing her nearer to him (that good parson Petherick is placidly contemplative of the landscape). "If I love you! There are no ifs in

such love as mine. But it's hardly a pleasant thing to learn that one is to be received as the serpent that crept into Eden. Is it Hetheridge's old family or large estate which has won your sister's heart?"

"Neither, dear. She likes him because he is so good and true."

"And she harbours a lurking notion that I must needs be bad and false—an incarnation of city vices as opposed to rustic virtues. I think you would have grown weary of Mr. Hetheridge's provincial perfection, my pet, in the lasting tête-à-tête of matrimony."

"Let us talk about the house, Herman. How pretty it must be!"

Hereupon follows a vivid description of the Fulham villa: the river—the clumsy old wooden bridge—Putney church, grave and gray—the episcopal palace with its shady garden—the secluded quiet of the place.

"I have had such a happy idea about the dining-room," says Herman. "You remember the scene in *Hemlock*, the Pompeian triclinium?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, I have told Molding and Korness to make our hall and dining-room Pompeian. The success of *Hemlock* will very well balance any extravagance in the suggestion."

"What a charming idea!" exclaims Editha; "but isn't it wrong to spend so much money upon furnishing, Herman? We are not going to be rich."

"My love, do you remember what Dr. Johnson said about Thrale's brewery, when the business was being sold? 'We are not here to sell a parcel of boilers and vats, but the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice.' Do you hold literature as something less than beer, and are you going to limit my power of increasing our income? You do not know what strength I shall have to labour, dear, when I have given hostages to Fortune."

"Dear Herman, how brave you are!" she cries admiringly, as if he stood on the topmost rung of a scaling-ladder in a storm of shot and shell; "but the humblest home you could make for me would be just as dear as the finest house your successful work can win. I want to be your helpmate, not a burden to you."

They are driving up to the porch of Lochwithian by this time. The old dogs lie basking in the sunshine; the old-fashioned flower-beds are full of bloom. The fishpond and the fountain, the crumbling old red walls where the peaches and apricots are ripening, smile at him as in welcome. Every familiar feature of the place is the same as when he saw it first just a year ago;

the only difference is that the Editha of last year was a stately stranger about whom he thought with vague wonder, while the Editha of to-day is his very own—his wife that is to be.

"Darling," he whispers with a little gush of emotion, "I am so happy when I think of last year and this."

"Come to see Ruth," says Editha directly they have alighted. She leads him straightway up the shallow old oaken staircase, past the newel over which he remembers her looking down at him when they parted, along the shadowy corridor where stand old blue-delf jars crammed with rose-leaves, and into the white panelled parlour where the invalid sister reclines, just as he saw her first, in spotless cambric morning robe, with a knot of coloured ribbon here and there among the soft white drapery.

"He has come, Ruth," cries Editha, as if this arrival formally announced by letter two days ago, were something wonderful.

"I am very glad," replies Ruth softly, in that gentle voice of hers which has a touch of pathos at times. How do you do, Herman? Welcome to Lochwithian, brother. We are brother and sister henceforward, are we not? bound to each other by our common love for Editha."

"I hope to be not all unworthy to claim a brother's name," says Herman, kissing the hand that lies trustingly in his. He feels that, in his character of serpent, he has been received with no small indulgence. "I fear you must hate me for coming here to steal your darling," he says humbly.

Ruth's grave eyes seem to be looking him through and through, perusing all the flaws and specks and knots in the grain of his nature.

"I am not quite selfish enough for that," she answers sadly, "though it has been one of my prayers that Editha's home and mine should never lie far apart. But my chief thought and desire must always be for her happiness. If it is happier for her that we should live apart, so be it. I am content."

Editha and Ruth have clasped hands, the younger girl kneeling by her sister's couch.

"We are never to be long apart, dearest," says Editha. "I am coming home to see you and papa at least three times a year, and you are coming to us twice in the year; that will leave short intervals of separation."

"Our home will be yours, Ruth," says Herman. "It shall not be our fault if it is not made pleasant to you."

"I will come to you some day, if God gives me strength," answers Ruth, her eyes clouded with tears, but a smile on the sensitive mouth. "It will be sweet to me to see my pet in her new home—to see her happy and beloved."

After this all doleful thoughts are dismissed. They talk of the house at Fulham—the Pompeian hall and dining-room; the drawing-room, which is to be furnished like a room in a Dutch picture, after a drawing of Herman's; garden small, but sheltered by a few good old trees, and altogether perfect in its way.

"A garden where we can take our coffee on summer evenings, Editha," adds Herman, "and where I can lie at your feet thinking out my work, while you watch the boats gliding past, silent as shadows, on the starlit river."

How sweet it all sounds, and to Ruth's ear how vague! Editha gazes up at her lover with ineffable rapture—her poet lover; for to her mind he is no less than a poet—a creature apart, gifted with an unsurpassable birthright. She believes that every feeling of his, every fancy, every desire is of a finer texture than the feelings, fancies, and desires of ordinary mankind. The bitter truth that in common things your poet is apt to be no better than common men has yet to be revealed to her.

Ruth thinks of honest, earnest, single-minded Vivian, and wonders whether a man who lives by the cultivation of his fancy, and must in some measure be the slave of his fancy, whose temper is irritated by a perpetual struggle to excel, will ever make as good a husband as that simple-hearted Radnorshire squire. Will the time ever come when either of these two—all in all to each other to-day, and seeing nothing in life beyond—will find a something wanting in their union, a sense of something missed, something that might have been, and is not? That "might have been" is the curse of your poetic temperament. The lovers leave Ruth and wander out into the garden by and by, and through the great stable-yard, and across an ancient orchard to the ruins, and Herman renews his acquaintance with scenes and objects in which he has henceforward a personal interest. They stroll together by the narrow river, where the forget-me-nots are blooming just as they bloomed last year; and they look up at the solemn hills which have outlasted Lochwithian Priory, and taste that utter and perfect happiness which only such lovers know—lovers whose future lies before them smooth as some placid lake shining under the summer sun.

The Squire receives his future son-in-law heartily, not because he is reconciled to the match—which he is not—but because he is too hospitable a man to be otherwise than cordial to his guest. One of the prettiest rooms in the Priory has been allotted to Herman—a room at one end of the rambling old house, with an oriel window overlooking the shrubbery and the church in the hollow beneath.

"I shall hear the bell ringing for early service of a morning, and be reminded that there are God-fearing men and women in this out-of-the-way corner of the land. I wish I could follow their footsteps and feel that I was doing good for my soul," Herman says to himself with a sigh, as he looks out of his window before dressing for dinner.

Time glides by with a divine quiet at Lochwithian. There is a dinner at the Priory soon after his arrival, and Herman is presented to the county families resident within visiting distance. Other dinners follow to which Herman is bidden, and he feels that he is received and accepted as Editha's future husband; but the dinner parties hardly make any break in these halcyon days of his life. They are very quiet gatherings, and he is generally allowed to have Editha all to himself for the greater part of the time, so that the dinner parties in a manner resolve themselves into delicious assemblies of two. Editha and he are seated apart at an open window; or they stroll out into the moonlit garden to look at the roses; or they linger in a conservatory because the rooms are warm. Everybody is indulgent to them, and they are petted and humoured as if they were children.

"Rather humiliating, isn't it, darling, that our condition should be so obvious to every one?" says Herman; whereupon Editha laughs and blushes, and rearranges the spray of maiden-hair which she pinned in his coat in the hall at Lochwithian. She feels even in this small matter of providing a flower for his button-hole that she is beginning her duties as a wife.

They are about together all through the happy summer days; sometimes no farther than the garden or the ruins—sometimes riding with the Squire—sometimes climbing the hills or exploring distant villages with Mr. Petherick and his trusty dogs for their companions. One day they spend the sultry afternoon quite alone on the bank of the Pennant, which at one romantic spot rushes like a cataract between steep walls of moss-greened crag—rocky boulders in whose clefts and crevices tender ferns grow thick and green. There is a narrow and somewhat perilous wooden bridge across this torrent, which is one of the features of the neighbourhood.

Here Editha and Herman have seated themselves in the sultry after-luncheon hours, sheltered by a tangled mass of greenery, in which oak, ash, and alder, birch and sycamore, are mixed together anyhow, for beneath the crags there is abundance of dark rich loam in which the gnarled roots find their sustenance.

Editha is seated on a low bank, hemming a child's pinafore—those busy fingers of hers clothe half the cottage children about

Lochwithian. Herman lies at her feet, looking up at little flecks of warm blue sky shining among the tangled leaves. The sun steeps that summer roof and sheds a greenish light, as through the stained glass of a minster window.

Herman yawns and then sighs—the yawn expresses the blissfulness of repose, the sigh is in self-reproach.

“Not a line written since I came to Lochwithian,” he says, “and I meant to be so industrious.”

“I try to leave your mornings free always, Herman ; but you come strolling out into the garden or down to the village just when I fancy you are so busy.”

“Elective affinity, dearest. I find myself drawn towards you whether I will or not. I open my desk, and dip my pen in the ink, and wait for an idea. But when the idea comes it is only Editha. What is Editha doing ? I must go and look for Editha. That is the nearest approach to an idea that I can dig out of my inner consciousness. The fact is, I am too happy to be industrious. If you do not consent to our being married very soon, Editha, I shall be a ruined man.”

“You expect to be not quite so happy when we are married,” says Editha, smiling at the little pinafore.

“No, love, but to be less tumultuously blest. There will be a placid certainty—the knowledge that you are mine till the end of my days, the sense that our life is laid down in a groove, and that we have nothing to do but travel smoothly on. When we come back from Switzerland, and I settle down in my own little den at Fulham—my books of reference at my elbow, my publisher getting impatient—I shall write as if by steam. Here every bird’s song is an invocation to the spirit of idleness. Shall it be the fifteenth of September, love ?” he pleads, raising himself upon his elbow, and bringing himself nearer Editha, so near that he is in some danger of having his countenance wounded by that busy needle.

He is talking of his wedding-day, which has been a subject of discussion between them for some time.

“Dear Herman, you know that I want one more year at home,” replies Editha seriously ; “I want to spend another year with Ruth, and among the poor people I have known so long. I want to wind up my life here deliberately, and not snap the thread suddenly as if I had grown tired of home and those who love me.”

“Another year ! My dear Editha, be reasonable. Think of the house taken and furnished, rent running on, taxes, furniture spoiling, walls mildewing, gilding tarnishing.”

“It was foolish of you to take a house so hurriedly,” says Editha reproachfully.

"Foolish to build my nest after St. Valentine's-day? Editha, am I to think that a few old women, affecting piety with an eye to the loaves and fishes — a flock of drawling nasal school-children, who know more of the multiplication table than their limited finances will ever bring into play—are to come between you and me, and doom me to a year of unsettled and solitary existence?"

"I am thinking of Ruth as well as of my pensioners and school-children."

"Put Ruth out of the question. We have settled that Ruth is to lose very little of your society after you are married. I wish you'd put down that pinafore, Editha; the click-click of the needle disturbs the serenity of the atmosphere."

Editha obeys without a word. She is likely to be that traitor in the camp of strong-minded womanhood, an obedient wife. Herman takes the industrious hand prisoner, and holds it during the rest of his discourse.

"Dear love, why should we not be married soon? My life is broken, disorganised, out of joint, till we begin the world together in our new home."

A little more persuasion, and she yields the point. Ruth has told her that, if she is sure of her lover's worthiness, there is nothing to be gained by a long engagement. Her father is indifferent, seeing that she is determined to marry Herman Westray, whether the marriage be soon or late. Of herself, unaided, she is not strong enough to oppose Herman's wish; so it is settled that the marriage is to take place on the fifteenth of September, which, the almanac informs them, falls on a Thursday. They are at the end of July already, but the question of her trousseau not being paramount with Editha, it does not occur to her to protest that six weeks are much too short for preparation, from a dress-maker's point of view. She has no idea of spending half her small capital in finery. Her plentifully furnished wardrobe, her stock of rare old lace, inherited from her mother, will need no large additions to be ample for the requirements of a young matron. Very far from her thoughts are wedding finery and wedding festivities. She is inclined to search deeper into the beginning of things.

"Herman, what first made you think of me?" she asks, looking at his upturned face as he leans on his elbow, his head thrown back a little, his eyes lifted to hers. "Our lives lie so far apart."

"Perhaps that was the very fact that set me thinking of you," he answers, quite willing to be questioned, rather pleased indeed to analyse his feelings. "You came into my life like a

creature out of a purer and better world, and my heart went to you naturally. If I had met you at a ball, just in the beaten way of society, I might have thought you the handsomest woman in the room, but I should hardly have known you to be the one woman among all womankind whose love was best worth winning."

"I don't quite understand how you were to find that out here," Editha replies, smiling at his praise. "First, I am a very ordinary person; and next, you saw very little of me."

"I heard your praises from others, and I saw you in your home, with your sister—the giver of gladness in your narrow circle. I saw and heard enough to send me away with your image in my heart. I did not surrender myself too readily; I made believe to myself that I was not in love with you; but the book I wrote last winter was one long *tête-à-tête* with you, and I was perfectly wretched till we met again."

"Herman," Editha says gravely, coming to that one awful question which no woman can refrain from asking—though the answer, if honestly given, is sure to make her miserable—"did you ever care for any one else? Your first love—to whom was that given, and why did it end unhappily?"

Herman winces slightly at the question.

"First love, Editha, is the offspring of fancy, and has its source in the brain rather than the heart. First love is like one's first champagne—a transient intoxication. Mine came to a very prosaic end. The lady jilted me, dismissed me without a day's warning."

"Then she must have been unworthy of you."

"Not unworthy of me, perhaps, but unworthy of my regret. I was wise enough to discover that in time, and wasted none upon her," adds Herman carelessly.

Editha is grateful to him for his candour, and yet a little disappointed, for it would have been so much sweeter if Herman could have told her that she herself was his first love.

"Were you very much in love with the lady?" she asks, taking up the little pinafore again, and smoothing down the hem with extreme nicety.

"Over head and ears; but it was calf-love remember. The girl was accomplished, diabolically clever; not absolutely beautiful, but graceful beyond measure. Just the kind of girl to bewitch an undergraduate. I thought her simply the most charming creature I had ever seen or dreamed of. We had been children together, and one day she beamed upon me suddenly as a woman."

"You had known each other from childhood! Then she must

have loved you. Perhaps she was influenced by others when she jilted you," hazards Editha, slow to believe that anyone could voluntarily play him false.

"Possibly."

"Did she marry for money?"

"The man she married had expectations, I believe, but they were never realised. He died a few years after his marriage, and left his widow in very indifferent circumstances."

"Have you ever seen her since then?"

This is trying. Herman digs his elbow into a little hillock of moss, and endeavours to look unconcerned.

"Yes, I have met her, once in a way, in society."

"But not often?"

"No; our lives lie far apart. Editha," he adds, solemnly, seeing the cloud upon her face, "be jealous neither of the past nor of the future. No rival can ever come between us two."

"Are you quite sure of that, Herman?"

"As sure as that I live and hold your hand in mine," he answers, clasping it fondly.

"Because, if there is the shadow of doubt in your mind, leave me my old life. When we are married, and I have left home and father and sister, and everybody and everything I have loved and lived for until now, for your sake, I shall be unreasonably exacting perhaps, and ask for more than you can give, if you cannot give me all your heart."

"It is yours, love—yours and no other's. It went forth to you gladly, as a bird flies to meet the summer. It is yours for ever and ever—the for ever of man's brief span."

"Mine in God's for ever, I trust," she answers solemnly. "I cannot imagine a heaven in which we shall not see and know our friends again."

Herman kisses the fair white hand for sole reply: and they are happy; fondly believing in each other and a love unassailable by time or change.

CHAPTER XIV.

"So, she leaning on her husband's arm, they turned homeward by a rosy path which the gracious sun struck out for them in its setting. And O there are days in this life worth life and worth death. And O what a bright old song it is, that 'O 'tis love, 'tis love, 'tis love, that makes the world go round.'"

It is the last week, the last day of Editha's home life. All that she has loved and tended and created and cared for in that

placid circle of home is to be surrendered at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning in favour of Herman Westray. She may come back to Lochwithian Priory—she means to return thither often—but it will be as a guest and in some measure a stranger. She is touched with sadness on this bright September morning as she counts her loss, wandering slowly round the old gardens alone, saying good-bye to every rose-tree and all the familiar flowers in the humble little greenhouses that have been paid for with her pocket-money and built after her own design. To all intents and purposes she has been sole mistress of Lochwithian Priory for the last five years, Ruth being no more than adviser, and the Squire content to rub along easily, just able to meet the demands of his bailiff, who hungers for machinery on the home-farm, and is eager to follow the march of agricultural progress.

Here, by the fountain on whose margin they sat when first he came to the Priory, Herman finds his betrothed. She is looking at the restless gold-fish dreamily, with a cluster of tea-roses in her hand.

"Dear love, I have been looking for you everywhere. What, the waterworks turned on already, Editha? I thought young ladies reserved the supply for the wedding morning."

"I have been saying good-bye to the garden, Herman," she answers, smiling through her tears.

"You should have made it *au revoir*, dearest."

"It will never be my garden any more, Herman."

"And for sole exchange I give you a lawn about the size of a tablecloth, with one immemorial elm, a weeping-willow, a tree or two of the coniferous tribe, an ancient mulberry in the corner, and a pink horse-chestnut. A remarkable collection, I think, for a suburban garden."

"I feel sure that it is lovely," she answers, looking across the valley to the steep green slopes beyond, with one bold hill that seems to touch the sky. "It will be so nice to have the river flowing past our lawn; but I am afraid that just at first I shall miss the hills. They are a part of my life, somehow. One of the first things I can remember is standing on the top of that green peak looking down at the Priory, all the windows shining in the evening sun, and thinking that the house was lighted for a grand party. I was quite a little child, and had strayed out of the garden and climbed the hill by myself, and was half way down again before my nurse found me."

"Enterprising little soul! We will take a holiday in the hill country twice a year, Editha. You shall not suffer nostalgia. And, remember, I am going to introduce you to the monarch of

mountains, so you needn't weep for these Cambrian ant-hills. What are you going to do with yourself all day?"

Herman has only returned from London the day before yesterday, and is residing on this occasion under Mr. Petherick's hospitable roof, but contrives nevertheless to spend most of his time with Editha.

"I must say good-bye to the people at Llanmoel."

"Is that the eccentric little settlement at the base of that great hill you showed me the other day?"

"Yes."

"Let us set off at once, then, and make a day of it."

"But I am afraid it will tire you, Herman. It is a long walk, and there are several people I want to see. And then Mr. Petherick may think it unkind of you to desert him."

"That best of men has given me my liberty till we meet at your father's dinner-table. And as to being tired of a long day with you, love—why, it will be an instalment of our honeymoon."

They set out together in the fresh bright noon-tide, Herman carrying a good-sized basket full of keepsakes for Editha's pensioners—young women she has taught as children when no more than a child herself; old people she has ministered to almost from her babyhood, when she went with her nurse to carry small comforts to the poorest among the peasantry, fair as a child-angel to their delighted eyes.

Their way lies for the most part through meadows—meadows of all shapes and sizes—with high tangled hedgerows and steep ferny banks, which remind Herman of his native Devonshire, and just a little of that summer day when Myra Clitheroe promised to forego fame for his sake. From the last of the meadows they emerge on the bank of the Pennant, cross a rustic suspension bridge, and enter a hilly road, little more than a lane as to width, and as stony as it is picturesque.

They talk for a long time of Herman's books, past, present, and to come, in which Editha is intensely interested. She will not be one of those wives who prefer the *Family Herald* to their husband's masterpieces, or who look upon a new novel from the marital pen as the source of a new drawing-room carpet. She questions him closely about the shadows of his brain, and he finds that his creations are more real to her than they are even to himself.

"You must have been deeply in love that first time, Herman, or you could never have written your first novel," she says, that first romance being a record of passionate disappointed love.

"My dearest, I am happy to say I never committed forgery,

yet the critics were good enough to pronounce that the fraudulent banker's clerk in my second novel is very true to life."

Editha shakes her head dubiously. She is not able to explain her convictions, but she feels that the mechanism of that second novel is art, while the passion of love and anger in the first is nature.

He tells her the plan of his new book—the story which is half written, and which he stands pledged to complete before Christmas—and finds it very pleasant to confide his ideas to a thoroughly sympathetic companion. He is not a man prone to impart his fancies, but he finds a new habit growing upon him since he and Editha have been plighted lovers. He is not content nowadays till he has told her his last inspiration.

They loiter on the way a good deal, and it is two o'clock when they ascend the stony lane. There is another meadow to cross before they come to Llanmoel, which secluded village is not on any particular road, but seems to have been dropped down anyhow among the fields. A meadow brings them to the church, which in architectural pretensions might be a barn, and which modestly hides itself under an enormous yew—a yew so gigantic and intrusive that one great branch has grown close up to the church wall, and has had to be lopped lest it should knock down that rural temple.

Grazing placidly among the lopsided tombstones, Herman and Editha find a donkey, evidently belonging to some privileged freeholder, and serenely indifferent to their approach. The clumsy old porch of plaster and woodwork, ivy-grown, with a Norman arch over the church-door, and a little bit of quaintly carven stonework, whereon blunt-nosed angels are depicted, the narrow loophole windows in the rough-cast wall, the square wooden tower, are all very much like the little church down by the Shaky Bridge; and Herman, not being archæologically given, does not desire to survey the interior of the fane. So they cross the churchyard, and go out of a little gate which brings them to a lane leading to nowhere in particular, a row of one-story cottages, thatched and in the last stage of decay, a forge, and a wooden building turned endways to the lane, which Herman supposes to be a dilapidated barn, until, looking up, he perceives a sign hanging from the angle nearest the road, and is thus made aware that it is "The New Inn. M. A. Gredby. Licensed to sell beer, spirits, tobacco, &c."

M. A. Gredby is one of Editha's pensioners; so Herman is introduced to the interior of the New Inn, which consists, or appears to consist, of the public room and a back kitchen. A corkscrew staircase squeezed into a corner suggests sleeping accommoda-

tion in the sloping roof. The public room is low and dark, the ceiling encumbered by timbers ponderous enough to sustain the upper chambers of a mediæval fortress. One side of the apartment is swallowed up by the open hearth and chimney; but, as M. A. Gredby's customers are in the habit of sitting in the chimney-corners, and making much of the fire even in summer-time, this is by no means lost space. Two old men in smock-frocks are seated on a bench inside the chimney to-day, smoking long clay pipes and looking at the fire.

The apartment, small in itself, and rendered smaller by its architectural characteristics, is farther reduced by an overplus of furniture—ancient high-backed windsor chairs, ponderous tables, and a horse-hair-covered sofa of clumsy proportions; garniture pendent from the cross-beams in the way of onions, bacon, and a netful of apples. The one latticed window is obscured by a variety of small wares designed to attract the eye of local childhood, but which seem to have missed their end, as the sugar-sticks have the pale and clouded look of advanced age, the hard-bake has faded from brown to gray, the black-jack has oozed through its paper covering, and the battledores display more fly-marks than parchment.

Into this dark little den Herman peers wonderingly, while Mrs. Gredby pours forth her rapturous greeting. She is not a native of the district, and takes a pride in declaring the fact.

"To think that you should come to see me, Miss Editha, to-day of all days, and your wedding to-morrow! Yes, I saw it in the paper, and I means to walk over, if I drops on the way, to see you in your wedding-dress. And I've been trying to persuade my old gentleman; but, lor, he hasn't no spirit, he hasn't, and says he can't walk so far. He's a Welshman, you see, and he hasn't the spirit for it. I walks into Llandrysak and back again every market day, and makes light of it, though I shall be sixty-five next birthday. But then I was born at Cheltenham; I don't belong to this place."

Mrs. Gredby has lived at the New Inn for the last forty years, but has not yet got over her contentment for Llanmoel, which is only second in degree to her contempt for her old gentleman.

A grunt of acquiescence or negation from one of the old men smoking in the chimney-corner identifies him with the subject of Mrs. Gredby's discourse.

"Ah, you may grunt and grumble," exclaims that lady, "but if you had a hounce o' spirit, you'd walk over to Lochwithian to see Miss Editha in her wedding-dress."

"I seed her father married," mumbles the old man, without taking his pipe out of his mouth; "that'll do for me. I seed

her mother buried; that was a rare sight, that was—sixteen murning curches. That'll last my time. Miss has got my blessing wherever she goes; but I ain't got strength for no more sight-seeing."

"I've brought Mr. Westray, the gentleman I'm going to marry, to see you," says Editha.

"And a fine-grown gent he is too," exclaims Mrs. Gredby; "but, without offence to him, I wish he'd been Mr. Hetheridge. I'm no Welshwoman, thank God; if I was, I daresay I should take it more to heart that you're not going to marry a Welshman. But I do wish it had been Mr. Hetheridge—such a noble, fresh-coloured young gentleman—and that you'd been going to settle among us."

Editha blushes crimson, and Herman feels that his foot is not on his native heather, and that his name is a matter of indifference to Mrs. Gredby.

"Mr. Westray is a very famous gentleman in London," says Editha; "he writes books which people admire very much."

"Tracks?" inquires Mrs Gredby, somewhat scornfully.

"No, not tracts."

"I'm glad of that. There's too many Methodies in this part of the country; they're always pestering with their blessed tracks. I likes my Bible as I likes my drop of spirits—neat. I don't care about having Scripture chopped into little bits and mixed up with other people's notions."

"That reminds me, Mrs. Gredby, that I've brought you a Bible for a keepsake, and a couple of silver spoons for you and Mr. Gredby, so that you may think of me sometimes when you drink your tea."

A small black teapot among the ashes on the hearth suggests that Mrs. Gredby is a confirmed tea-drinker.

"Bless your kind heart, miss, we don't want nothin' to remind us of you. We shall think of you often enough when you're settled up in London, which I'm told has growed into a very fine town, with a numbankmint and a wiadux, though not so genteel as my native place—Cheltenham. We shall think of you, Miss Editha, never fear."

Editha extracts the Bible and the teaspoons from a variety of neat little packages in the basket. Both gifts are received with rapture, but it is clear that the teaspoons go nearest to Mrs. Gredby's heart. The Gredby initials—man and wife—have been engraved on each spoon.

"I never owned a silver teaspoon before, Miss Editha," says the matron, "though I come of a very respectable fambly. My mother had six teas and four salts, real silver, with King George

and the leper's head on them, besides a lion with his fore-paw lifted up, and a deal of ornamentation; but my eldest brother came into them, with the rest of the property, as heir-at-law, and kep' 'em, set out among the glass and chaney on his cheffaneer, till things went wrong with him, being a master carpenter in a small way, and the spoons was murtgaged to his creditors."

Mrs. Gredby's old gentleman crawls feebly out of the chimney-corner to behold and admire the spoons, which he turns over in his horny palm as if they were natural curiosities.

After this it is time to say good-bye, and Mrs. Gredby dissolves into tears.

"I hope you wouldn't think it a liberty if I was to ask leaf to kiss you, Miss Editha, having knowd you from a child," she says pathetically; and Editha submits to be kissed by the proprietress of the New Inn, who doesn't often taste butcher's meat—the nearest butcher living three miles off—and who makes up for that deprivation by a copious use of onions. Herman, suffering sympathetic torture, makes a wry face during the operation.

"And now," says Mrs. Gredby, making a dart at the little black pot, "you must have a cup 'o tea and a bit of currant cake after your walk."

Editha protests that she has not time to take refreshment, but the energetic M. A. Gredby snatches some cups and saucers from one of the numerous shelves which encumber the walls, and spreads them on a massive iron teatray. From another shelf she produces a mysterious-looking substance, of pallid hue, ornamented with black spots which look like defunct flies.

"It's a trifle mowldy, miss," she apologises, as she slices this substance; "but I made it with my own hands, and it's genu-wine."

Editha and Herman decline the cake on the ground of feeble appetite, but consent to take a little tea. That infusion is very black and very strong, and tastes so much like senna, that Herman is fearful lest Mrs. Gredby should be practising upon him for his ulterior benefit, after the manner of careful nurses with small children.

After making a faint pretence of drinking tea, Editha and her betrothed take leave of Mr. and Mrs. Gredby, and proceed to visit the smaller dwellings in the settlement. Everywhere Editha is received with the same tokens of affection, wept over, kissed, adored, while Herman stands looking on. It is sweet to him to see how much she is beloved, and his heart is stirred with a secret pride as he thinks how willingly she has surrendered all this worship and allegiance, her happy useful life among her native hills, to follow his uncertain fortunes.

The basket contains keepsakes for every one—always something pretty and useful and appropriate, which appears in every case to be the object most ardently desired by the recipient. Bright neckerchiefs, lace collars, Bibles, Testaments, inkstands, needlecases, come out of the basket, and elicit rapturous admiration.

"You'll not be forgotten when I am gone," Editha tells her various pensioners; "my sister will take care of you. You shall have your half-pound of tea every other Saturday the same as usual, Mrs. Davis."

"It isn't that I'm thinking of, miss," answers a hard-working matron. "It's the sight of your bright face we shall miss."

Llanmoel duly visited, Herman and Editha enter a lane—wild, rugged, and picturesque—which turns off at an angle by the side of the New Inn.

"Where are we going now?" asks Herman.

Editha points skyward.

"What, going to heaven so soon! I thought we were to be married first, and translated together."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that, Herman. You see the bank yonder. We are going to a farmhouse near the top."

"I see a mountain, like Brighton racecourse turned up endways, dotted with sheep."

"That's where we are going."

"Do people live up there, for example."

The lane is delightful—not always narrow; it widens by and by into a patch of wooded waste, with here and there a pool of water, fern-fringed, shadowed with blackberry and alder bushes, old hawthorns lichened and gray; all things wild, neglected, beautiful. Then the lane narrows again, and twists and wriggles up the hillside, and the valley widens as they rise above it; and Cymbries Bank and the Roman mound rise up before them far away to the west, in the glow of afternoon sunlight.

"Imagine anybody living up here," cries Herman, "alone among the Immensities, and nearly a day's journey from the butcher."

Steeper and steeper grows the lane, screened with hazel-bushes and wild apple, hawthorn and alder, till it brings them into a triangular farm-yard just under the summit of the hill. Such a lonely old farmhouse, decently kept and prosperous looking, the huge chimney-stacks composing about one-half of the building. A flight of steps leads up to the low wooden door, innocent of knocker or bell.

Herman thumps the portal with his stick, whereat a simple-minded-looking calf puts its head out of a shed in the yard and

lows plaintively, and an unseen dog barks indignantly, but there is no other answer. Herman knocks again and again, but with no further effect than irritating the invisible dog, and puzzling the mild-faced calf, whose mother salutes the intruders with a resentful bellow.

"I daresay Maggie and Jenny have gone to Llandrysak," says Editha. "I should like to have seen them. They were my prize scholars three years ago, and the prettiest girls in the neighbourhood. Would you like to go to the top of the hill?"

"Having come so far, it would be dastardly to desist," replies Herman. "A friend of mine—a famous Alpine traveller in his way—told me that when he got within twenty feet of the summit of Mont Blanc he would have given the world to lie down then and there, and give up life and the task together; but he crawled to the top somehow."

They leave the farmyard by a narrow ledge which leads upward, and from the hilltop survey the world below, seated side by side upon a low stone wall, which for some unknown reason divides the summit. To the right and left of them are peaks as high as that they have climbed, one clothed with bracken, the other bare. Below them rushes a mountain torrent through the cloven hills. They can see the little wooden tower of Llanmoel church in the valley beneath, and far away in the clear blue the scattered white houses of Llandrysak; but of a human being, near or far, there is no sign.

"I can almost distinguish the Cambria, and Dewrance playing croquet," says Herman.

Mr. Dewrance has come down to assist at to-morrow's ceremony. He has been succeeded at Llandrysak by a gentleman of an Evangelical turn, and the pretty little white and gray stone church on the common has made a retrograde movement, which is grateful to the native mind, but unwelcome to English visitors.

They sit for a little while curiously silent, moved to deepest thoughts by the serenity of the scene. On the threshold of her new life Editha's thoughts are mournful. Will he always love her, this stranger for whom she barter her nearest and dearest? Of Ruth's affection, of Ruth's sympathy, she is utterly sure; but his love may be a thing of impulse, and change or wane in the years to come. She looks at him wonderingly, fearfully, being certain of so little about him but the one absorbing truth that she loves him.

"Four o'clock, dearest, and we are between six and seven miles from the sound of the dressing bell," exclaims Herman, feeling that the melodious tinkling of a distant sheep-bell will speedily beguile him to slumber unless he bestirs himself somehow.

"We shall go home faster than we came, Herman ; the way is almost all down-hill."

"Ah, that's what makes the progress of life so rapid after five-and twenty—it is all down-hill."

They go back to the farmhouse. Herman assails the door with his stick again and again in vain. But half-way down the lane they meet the farmer's daughters, dark-eyed, blooming, lovely, carrying heavy baskets, and delighted at the sight of Editha.

"I should have been so sorry if I'd gone away without seeing you, Maggie, and you too, Jenny."

"O, if you please, miss, we are to be in the churchyard to-morrow, with all your old scholars."

"Really! That is kind."

Maggie's and Jenny's keepsakes are fished out of the basket, and there are kisses and kindly words of farewell.

"That was a little better than being kissed by Mrs. Gredby," says Herman, as he and Editha continue their journey.

"Poor Mrs. Gredby! When my brothers were little boys, it was their great delight to visit Mrs. Gredby, and sit in the chimney-corner with old Mr. Gredby. He used to make them pea-shooters, and to lend them an old gun long before they were allowed to have guns of their own. I'm afraid to think how much mouldy cake they must have eaten. I know Mrs. Gredby used to give them sausages, and black pudding, and all manner of dreadful things."

"I daresay your Indian brother is suffering for those juvenile indiscretions now, and calling it liver," replies Herman.

They arrive at Lochwithian only just in time for the dressing-bell. The Priory is full of guests. Editha's clerical brother has arrived on the scene, with his wife and two eldest girls, who are to be bridesmaids. Two young ladies of ancient Welsh family have come from a distant grange for the same purpose. Mr. Dewrance is there in readiness for to-morrow, and Mr. Petherick comes to dinner. Editha has no more time for mournful thoughts till late that night, when she kneels beside Ruth's sofa, and confides her vague doubts and fears to that sympathetic listener. Ruth's words are full of comfort.

"Dearest, your own heart has chosen," she says. "I think there is a divine instinct in a heart as pure and true as yours. Why should we fear the issue?"

"It seems so hard to leave you, Ruth, so selfish. But you do like him, don't you, Ruth? You can trust him?"

"Yes, dear ; if he will only be true to the better part of his nature : and with you for his counsellor he can hardly be otherwise."



To-morrow, and they stand side by side in the beautified church, before an altar glorious with all white flowers that bloom at this season—a church crowded with loving faces, many of them tearful, for at Lochwithian this marriage is in some wise a public calamity.

The autumn sun shines warm and bright. School-children, and young women who were Editha's scholars a few years ago, line the path from the church door to the Priory gates, and cast their tributary blossoms before the bridal pair. To young and old Editha, in her white dress and veil, seems like an angel.

The crowd does not lessen when the wedding party have gone back to the house; the people wait to see the last of their favourite. Mrs. Gredby is there, splendidly got up in a Paisley shawl of many colours and a green gauze bonnet. There are two or three national hats come from remote villages, but smart bonnets of the last metropolitan fashion prevail.

There is to be a tea-drinking in the afternoon on a large scale for old and young, and in the mean time an itinerant vendor dispenses cakes and sweetstuff to the excited throng. At last the carriage which is to convey bride and bridegroom to the Llandrysak station appears before the porch, and, after an interval, Editha reappears in her simple travelling-dress, leaning on her father's arm, Herman on the other side, and the brother and sister-in-law, cousins, friends, and clergy in the background.

The young couple drive off amidst a burst of cheers which the hillsides echo thunderously, Editha looking back at her old home till the road winds and shuts it from her sight.

"Never quite my own home any more," she murmurs sadly. "Good-bye, happy days of youth!"

CHAPTER XV.

"Epouvantable et complet désastre. Le vaisseau semblait sans laisser ni un cordage ni une planche sur le vaste océan des espérances."

THE Frivolity is closed during the season of London's emptiness, and Mrs. Brandreth is enjoying the blissfulness of repose at the sleepy little Belgian watering-place of Heldenberg, near the good old city of Memlingstadt. Not altogether a bad place, this Heldenberg, with its monster hotel and fine sea-wall; its vast

stretch of golden sands and colony of bathing-boxes; its row of smart new villas facing the sea; and its cluster of ancient houses built in a snug little hollow under the lee of a sandbank, comfortably sheltered from ocean waves and stormy winds. There are the cosiest little restaurants down in this old town of Heldenberg, a sprinkling of humble shops, a dim old church, and a post-office. All the rest of Heldenberg is new, and spreads itself in a line with its face to the sea, steadfastly ignoring the original settlement, from whose lower level the fashionable watering-place is approached by steep stone steps, upon which shrill-voiced females exhibit their small wares, and tempt the idle visitor to unpremeditated outlay. Those large flat currant-cakes which are the glory of Belgium may be had here, and the Heldenberg mussel, a fish of some distinction, is purveyed upon the stone landings. Not often does the upper town descend to the lower town, the great hotel providing for all the wants of its patrons, internal and external, and the landscape between Heldenberg and Memlingstadt offering no farther attraction to the explorer than is to be found in level sands intersected by an occasional ditch, or a row of stunted willows a canal with barges and water-gates, and here and there the verdure of a cabbage-garden.

Mrs. Brandreth has come to Heldenberg as a quiet out-of-the-way place, where she is not likely to find many English people, or to be recognised and stared at. She has her reward. There are very few English at Heldenberg, which does not offer many attractions to the British mind. It is not a stage upon the high-road of Europe, like Ostend; it has no steamers, no direct communication with any place except Memlingstadt. Its *établissement* is in its infancy, its dissipations of the mildest order. The Belgians come here in flocks, proud of having created Heldenberg by their own unaided efforts. It is a plant of purely native growth, owes no favour to the rest of Europe, and its cleanliness, freshness, and brightness are very fair to Belgian eyes. To dress smartly, bathe abundantly, lounge away morning and afternoon on the esplanade, retiring at intervals for copious refreshment, and to hear indifferent music and play small games of chance in the evening, make up the sum of life at Heldenberg; a placid, simple existence, not over-costly, and leaving no bad taste in the mouth.

Myra has brought a box of new books, and a point-lace flounce which she has been at work upon for the last three years. She has avoided the public life of the monster hotel, enjoyable as it is to Belgian visitors, and has established herself in two pretty rooms, *au premier*, in one of the villas facing the sea. A large

family of healthy-looking children, whose existence appears to be one perpetual meal-time, occupy the apartments beneath. Myra has a balcony, lattice-shaded, in which she can sit on warm afternoons reading or working, or studying her part in Herman's new comedy, which work of genius he placed in her hands a few days before his last journey to Radnorshire.

The piece is strong, full of domestic interest and telling situations, and Myra's part is one of the finest she has ever had written for her. This quiet Belgian watering-place affords her ample leisure for study. She has time to think out the character; to create a living, breathing woman from the words of her author; to enlarge upon his ideas, and give form to his airiest fancy.

"I think even he will be proud and pleased if I carry out my idea of the character," she says to herself, sitting in the balcony in the warm afternoon sunshine with the manuscript comedy on her lap, just two days after Herman's wedding.

She has thought herself remote from all her world, and has been luxuriating in the rest and freedom which accompany the thought, when looking idly down at the esplanade she sees a gentleman in gray, with a white hat and bay-coloured whiskers, steadfastly regarding the balcony. He lifts his hat as she looks at him, and reveals the somewhat commonplace features of Lord Earlswood.

"How do you do, Mrs. Brandreth?" he remarks, with his accustomed tranquillity. "I thought I couldn't be mistaken. Your people could not tell me your number, so I have been exploring What's-its-name. I forget what the Belgians call this settlement. Rather like the east-end of Margate without the cockneys, isn't it?"

"Pray come in, if you want to talk," says Myra, with vexation of spirit, rolling up her manuscript.

Lord Earlswood is prepared to converse placidly from the pavement, regardless of the impression he may make upon the various families which crowd the brand-new villas.

"May I?" he says. "So delighted!"

He ascends the stone steps, disappears through the open portal, and reappears in Myra's drawing room, where the new books are scattered on sofa and tables, and the point-lace flounce displays itself half in and half out of a fairy work-basket lined with quilted rose-coloured satin. The newly-furnished apartment looks like a scene on the stage.

"How do you do?" says Myra, stifling a yawn. She had been in a delicious reverie that was almost slumber when her listless gaze alighted on Lord Earlswood's white hat. "What brings you to this quiet little place?"

"You may well ask that. I think it would have been only friendly to let a fellow know where you were coming. I called in Bloomsbury-square. No one could tell me anything, except that you'd gone to some foreign watering-place. It might be Ostend, or Boulogne, or Dieppe, or Biarritz, or Arcachon, or Jericho—no one knew. Went to the theatre—same result: meeting of the company announced for the 6th of October—that was all. It was Mrs. Lockstitch, your wardrobe woman, who put me on the right scent. She had made your dresses, and you had told her you wanted them in a quiet style for a quiet place. Hel—something, in Belgium. I looked up *Murray*, and found only one Belgian watering-place beginning with Hel; and here I am. Clever, wasn't it?"

"Pertinacious, at any rate," replies Myra.

"Ah, that's the next best thing, if it isn't better. 'It's doggedness does it.' I came across that sentence somewhere the other day, and it took my fancy. I flatter myself there's a good deal of doggedness in my composition."

"I thought you were grouse-shooting in the Highlands?"

"Everybody shoots grouse; I don't."

"You must be very anxious about your theatre," says Myra, taking up her flounce, and doing a stitch or two, *point Turque*, with infinite precision.

"I don't care two straws about the theatre. Come, Mrs. Brandreth, you know that as well as I do. I built it for you, just as I might have sent you a box of bonbons on New Year's day."

"A princely *bonbonnière*. But I am glad Fortune has been kind, and that so far you have had interest for your money."

"It's not very friendly to talk in that business-like way when a fellow has come across from Dover to Ostend—the worst passage I ever made—on purpose to see you."

"Extremely kind on your part, but rather foolish; unless Heldenberg and the Belgians prove amusing enough to reward your devotion. What can you have to say to me, or I to you, that would not be just as well said a month hence?"

"I don't know about that. First and foremost, I came to see you. It's a pleasure to me even to sit here watching you stitching at that blue-calico-and-white-tape arrangement. And then, again, I've a little bit of news for you," he adds, with a faint sparkle in his dull gray eyes. "News that I thought might interest you—about a friend of ours."

"What kind of news?" asks Myra, working industriously to cure her sleepiness.

"Well, I should call it—matrimonial."

"Miss Belormond has had an offer from that sporting baronet with the tight legs who used to hang about the stage-door?"

"No."

"Mr. Flanders, the low comedian, has married Bella Walters—at last? I'm sure she has tried hard enough to bring it about, poor girl!"

"No."

"Then I give it up."

"Your friend, Mr. Westray—" begins Lord Earlswood slowly. The work drops from Myra's hands as she looks up at him.

"Well, what of him?"

"O, nothing very particular. His marriage is in yesterday's *Times*."

"Some other Westray, perhaps."

"No; Herman Westray. Here's the paper;" and his lordship produces a neatly-folded supplement. "Herman Westray, only son of the late Reverend Thomas Westray of Colehaven, Devon, to Editha, second daughter of Morgan Morcombe, Esq., Lochwithian Priory, Radnorshire."

"I rather expected it," says Myra, with heroic composure. "I have seen them together at the Frivolity."

"O," exclaims Earlswood, mortified, "then you're not surprised?"

"Not particularly. If you crossed the Channel with the idea that you were bringing me a piece of astounding news, you have wasted your trouble."

She is especially gracious to him after this; allows him to share her afternoon tea, discusses her plans for the coming season at the Frivolity, and dismisses him in the last stage of mystification. And by and by, alone in her pretty bedchamber, with its snow-white drapery and continental gincrackery, she falls on her knees and raises her clasped hands, and takes an awful oath—not to the God of Christians assuredly, who can hardly be supposed to receive such vows, but to Nemesis, or the three fatal spinsters who deal calamity to man.

CHAPTER XVI.

"We'll live together like two neighbour vines,
 Circling our souls and loves in one another.
We'll spring together, and we'll bear one fruit;
One joy shall make us smile, and one grief mourn;
One age go with us, and one hour of death
 Shall close our eyes, and one grave make us happy."

HERMAN'S honeymoon fleets past him like a blissful dream. Life, which he had thought worn out and done with, save as a mere mechanical process, seems to have begun afresh for him—life and youth and happiness all renewed together like a second birth. Editha's companionship is so sweet in its utter novelty. This pure heart has so many treasures to lay at his feet. This innocent mind has such unknown deeps for him to sound. As her lover he had fancied that he knew all the wealth of her nature. As her husband he discovers a new world of thought and feeling which the girl had veiled from him.

Too fleet, too fair are those early days of their wedded life; like those radiant mornings which are apt to end in dull weather, the rose changing to gray, the sun vanishing behind angry clouds.

They have no thought of such change, these wedded lovers. Editha has no longer any doubt as to the wisdom of her choice, or the possibility of perfect happiness in this imperfect world. She sits by her husband one night while he writes a chapter of his novel, watches all the lights and shadows of the mobile face which changes with his theme, and is beyond measure happy. It is as if she had actually a part in his work, in his thoughts, in his genius; and when he reads her the concluded chapter—ineffable condescension!—bliss beyond the power of language to express.

She writes to Ruth from a little Swiss village a letter brimming over with joy, one of those honeymoon letters which we all receive occasionally from sister, or cousin, or familiar friend; a letter in which every sentence begins with "Dear Herman," "Dear Herman thinks," "Dear Herman says," "Dear Herman hopes,"—a letter which illustrates all the weaknesses of woman, and all her virtues.

That bright month—not to be reckoned as other months in the calendar—comes to an end like a tale that is told, and the newly-married couple come home to the house at Fulham. Then come new pleasures, the simple joys of domesticity. Huge chests

of linen, sent up from Lochwithian Priory to be unpacked and put away. Wedding presents to be disposed judiciously about the rooms; no easy task, as these gifts are for the most part incongruous and of doubtful taste—a pink-and-gold French clock and candelabra, for instance, which are an eyesore in that perfect drawing-room, whose pale green and white and tender lilacs are as delicate as a picture by Greuze.

Editha is enchanted with her new home. There is an artistic grace about the river-side villa, with its light airy rooms. Not numerous, but of a fair size. Messrs. Molding and Korness, not being harassed by interference from their customer, have surpassed themselves. There is nothing costly, or that strikes the observer as costly; no gilding, except the slenderest line of unburnished gold here and there; no sheen of satin or splendour of brocade; no vast expanse of looking-glass, confusing the sense with imaginary space. The Pompeian vestibule and dining-room are deliciously simple; encaustic tiles, unpolished ebony, cretonne draperies of classic design and rich subdued colour. The walls are painted a delicate French gray, relieved by a four-foot dado of ebonised panelling, and the ceiling of palest primrose. A broad border of ebonised wood surrounds the Venetian glass over the chimney-piece, and on this broad framework there are brackets supporting small bronze figures which might have been dug out of the lava that buried Herculaneum. A cretonne curtain divides the dining-room from a smaller chamber, looking upon the somewhat dingy byroad by which the villa is approached. This room has been lined from floor to ceiling on two sides with ebonised shelves for the accommodation of Herman's library, which is rather of the future than the present, his existing collection filling about a third of the space Messrs. Molding and Korness have allowed him; his desk, his reading-lamp, his chair, are perfection of their kind. A sofa of classic design has been provided for Editha opposite her husband's writing-table; a stand with russia-leather portfolio suggests a collection of photographs, which may help her to while away an idle hour; a rustic work-table in a corner hints at stocking-mending and the sewing-on of shirt-buttons. Glass, china, all the details of housekeeping are in harmony with one pervading idea. Everything is artistic. The very beer-jugs are Etrurian; the urn is as purely Greek as that finely sculptured brazen vase from which Antigone poured her libation upon the dead.

The servants have been provided by the house-agent, and have been recommended as models of probity. They are cook, housemaid, and parlourmaid, and present a very fair appearance on the evening of Mr. and Mrs. Westray's arrival, congregated in

the hall to carry in the boxes and travelling-bags—three smartly-dressed young women, whose starched muslin aprons are their only badge of servitude.

Now Editha begins her duties as matron and housekeeper, and all the small troubles and vexations of housekeeping on a limited scale gradually reveal themselves to her. After their first breakfast at home, when the rooms, and the cups and saucers, and the view from the windows, and the servants' faces are still as new to them as if they had just put up at a strange hotel, Herman gives his young wife twenty pounds and the daintiest little morocco account-book ever devised to make accounts fascinating.

"I think it will be wisest to pay the bills weekly, dear," he says, "and then we shall always know exactly how we stand financially. Do you think twenty pounds is enough for you to begin with?"

"O, Herman, twenty pounds ought to last us ever so long; a month I should think. Twenty pounds used to last a long time at Lochwithian, though we had ten servants instead of three. Certainly papa paid all the large accounts quarterly, and we had a great deal from the home farm."

"Here you will have to pay for everything. Bridge-end House produces nothing, not so much as a sprig of parsley to decorate the butter."

On this first day Herman leaves his wife to face the responsibilities of her position alone. He has been away from London five weeks, and is anxious to see his publishers, to look in at his favourite club, and to ascertain in a general way how the world has wagged in his absence. Editha goes to the hall-door with him, and sees him depart with that faint touch of heart-sinking which young wives are subject to on such occasions. Throughout their honeymoon they have not lived an hour asunder. This is the beginning of stern reality. Editha lingers in the hall for a minute or two, contemplating the rather dull outlook from the window: a dwarfed hedgerow and level market garden stretching away towards Walham Green; a church-spire and gray housetops in the distance; not so much as a mound of earth to relieve the dismal flatness of a cabbage and asparagus producing world. Then she screws her courage to the sticking-place, and penetrates those hidden and rearward premises of which she is nominal mistress, thinking that for this first day it will be wise to go to the cook, instead of summoning that functionary to an interview.

It is eleven o'clock by this time, and Mrs. Westray finds her establishment at luncheon, seated comfortably at the kitchen table with a substantial upstanding wedge of double gloucester, a quartern loaf, and the largest of the Etrurian beer-jugs before them.

They look somewhat disconcerted by her appearance, which they evidently regard as an intrusion. Cook wipes her mouth hastily and rises. She is a young woman, buxom and florid, with a look of having developed her figure upon buttered toast and hot suppers—a young woman with a sensual under-lip and a cunning eye. Housemaid and parlour-maid keep their seats. Very different this from Editha's welcome in the great old-fashioned kitchen at Lochwithian, where the cook and housekeeper of twenty years' service worshipped her, and the Welsh maidens smiled and curtsied as at the coming of a princess.

She discusses the dinner question. First, as the most important, cook has made bold to order the kitchen dinner already, to avoid loss of time. A nice little loin of pork and apple dumplings. "The others like pork," she says, with an air of self-abnegation. For the late dinner she suggests a pair of soles, a pair of fowls, and a small ham. "Which Fullers the tea-grocer says he has some prime York 'ams at sixteenpence a pound, and I might make you a happle tart, mum, and a few custards."

This dinner, though fair enough as a sample of the cook's capabilities, does not appear strikingly novel to Editha. Their honeymoon dinners have run very much upon roast fowl in those out-of-the-way Swiss hotels.

She racks her brains in the endeavour to think of something else; but saddles of mutton, fillets of veal, and fore-quarters of lamb are the only ideas that present themselves to her mind, and these are inappropriate to a *tête-à-tête* dinner.

"I think Mr. Westray would like a little game," she hazards.

"You might have a brace of pheasants, mum, after the fowls."

Four winged creatures to dine two people! There seems something wrong here.

"I should think one fowl and one pheasant would be quite enough," says the young housekeeper.

"It might be *enough*, ma'am, but it wouldn't do credit to a gentleman's table; and if master should 'appen to bring 'ome a friend promiscuous, the dinner would look shabby; and I'm sure you wouldn't wish that—just at first too."

"No, of course I don't wish that."

So cook has her way, and Editha feels somehow that this first attempt is not good housekeeping; and yet she has kept her father's house with credit and renown from seventeen years of age upwards, has dealt out stores on a large and liberal scale, kept accounts, and been nominally mistress of everything.

/ But it is one thing to deal with old servants whose master's goods are as their own—who would shudder at the idea of di-

verting a loaf of bread or a basin of dripping from its proper use ; who are as proud of the family they serve and as anxious for the family credit as if the same blood flowed in their veins, and the same good old race made honour a necessity of their being—and to have commerce with these sharp-witted London-bred girls, who look upon every new household they enter as a caravansera which they can leave at their pleasure, and domestic service as a means to the one great end of their existence, which includes good living, fine dress, and evenings out.

After her interview with the cook, Editha surveys the parlour-maid's pantry, which Messrs. Molding and Korness have made as perfect as a steward's cabin on board a modern steamship, but which the young person who has charge of it pronounces dark and damp.

"And I'm afraid we shall be overrun with mice, ma'am, for I've heard them scuffling after dark. I suppose it's along of living so near the river," adds the damsel, with a suppressed shudder.

✓ The storeroom and china-closet are in one, filled with locked presses for linen and groceries. In one of these presses Editha and the two maids stow away the ample supply of house-linen, the making and marking of which, by the school-children of Lochwithian, it has been Ruth's pride to supervise. The grocery-closet Editha discovers will be useless, as the grocer calls every day for orders ; and the cook assures her that it will be best and cheapest to order everything as it is wanted.

"I don't believe grocery would keep in them cupboards, mum, so near the river," adds cook sagaciously ; whereat Editha begins to understand that Father Thames is a friend to mice and inimical to grocery.

The grocery question settled, Mrs. Westray informs her household that she intends to pay all bills weekly, except such occasional supplies as can be paid for with ready money. She declares furthermore that she will require all accounts to be carefully examined and errors noted before they are submitted to her.

The cook seems somewhat to disapprove of weekly payments ; her last master paid everything by cheque, half-yearly, she informs Editha, and evidently considers her last master's method the nobler of the two.

"But if you do intend to pay weekly, mum," adds Jane the cook, with a sigh, "there's a few little accounts I'd better give you at once."

She searches a sauce-tureen or two and a vegetable-dish, which vessels contain reels of cotton, old letters, a dirty collar, small

change, penholders, and various oddments appertaining to the three young persons who are good enough to accept a temporary shelter in Mrs. Westray's house. From one of these receptacles she produces half a dozen crumpled bills more or less greasy; and from these documents Editha discovers that the week preceding her arrival—during which the young persons have been settling down in their new service, and making believe to clean rooms which had never been soiled—has been a somewhat expensive period. There is a little bill from the baker, and a hieroglyphical paper from the butcher, the original obscurity of which has been made more obscure by grease. Editha just contrives to decipher that the young persons have consumed three shoulders of mutton and four loins of pork in the week, and that they have furthermore required suet and calves' liver. The grocer's bill is the most alarming, for the grocer is a monopolist in his way, and sells bacon, cheese, eggs, and butter, as well as tallow-chandlery and colonial produce. Blacklead, bath-brick, sweet oil, hearthstone, scouring-paper, housemaids' gloves, lucifer matches, gas tapers, brooms, brushes, and blacking mount up in a positively awful manner. Six pounds and three-quarters of bacon have been indispensable as a provision for the four transparent rashers served at that morning's breakfast; nine pounds eleven ounces of double gloucester have been necessary to start the kitchen, and half a stilton has been ordered for the dining-room. Tea, coffee, sugar, rice, and tapioca have been laid in with equal liberality. There will be very little change out of a five-pound note from Mr. Fullers the grocer. Altogether Editha finds that her first payments will swallow up half of Herman's twenty pounds, and she has the satisfaction of hearing from the housemaid that more brooms, brushes, turksheads, furniture polishes, and Brunswick blacks are required before the house can be cleaned in a satisfactory manner.

This investigation of domestic affairs occupies some time, and then Editha goes up to her own pretty rooms and begins the task of unpacking. She has no maid—having insisted upon dispensing with that luxury in her new life, and being at all times independent of help—so the unpacking and arrangement of the trousseau take a long time; so long that she has but a few minutes before post-time to write hurriedly to Ruth, announcing her establishment in her new home.

“You must come to me soon, darling,” she writes, “if Dr. Price thinks you can bear the journey. I long to see you, to tell you all about our Swiss tour, and how more than good dear Herman is. I feel rather strange and lonely to-day in my new home, dear Herman having being obliged to go to town on busi-

ness—about his new book, you know, dear. It seems so odd to see strange servants, instead of the kind friendly faces at Lochwithian. I have brought presents for all of them from Switzerland, which I shall send in the box with your clock and jewel-casket; the clock from me, the casket from Herman, his own choice. I think you will like the carving.”

After this letter has been written and despatched, time seems rather to hang upon Editha's hands. The house, pretty as it is, has that new look which is not quite friendly. The impress of Messrs. Molding and Korness's work is still upon it—the varnish too bright, the colours of the draperies too fresh. Editha cannot feel that it is home yet awhile; and then this first severance from Herman even for a few hours is a trial. By five o'clock in the afternoon he seems to have been away so long. She wonders that he has not contrived to settle all business matters, and come back in time to take her for a walk before dusk.

She goes into the garden, but on this dull October afternoon Father Thames looks gloomy. A fog obscures the Surrey shore. A street lamp, lighted too soon, shows dimly here and there among the cold gray houses. Everything is dull and cold. She walks up and down the gravel-path by the water, and looks over the low boundary at a wide reach of mud despondently, and wonders to find that so large a portion of this much-extolled river consists of a dark slimy filth, obnoxious to sight and smell.

She soon wearies of that narrow lawn and gravel-path, so different from the gardens at Lochwithian, and goes back to the house, where she tries to amuse herself by looking at Herman's library. This does not prove particularly interesting, being confined to books of reference, admirable in their way, and those standard works with which Editha is familiar. She takes out a volume of Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*, and tries to read; but her thoughts wander from the page, and she finds herself listening for Herman's return.

They are to dine at half-past seven. At six the parlour-maid brings her a wishy-washy cup of tea, and a thin slice of new bread thickly buttered. This refreshment fails to revive her spirits, and she finds herself lapsing into melancholy on this first day of her home life.

But at last, just as she comes down-stairs in her simple dinner dress, a latchkey sounds in the hall-door, and Herman appears. Happy meeting, fond welcome, as after a severance of years.

“Why, my love, you look pale and tired,” he says, as they go into the library together. “You haven't been over-exerting yourself about domestic duties, I hope?”

“O no, dear; only—”

"Only what, my pet?"

"The day has seemed so long and dull without you."

"Has it, darling?" he exclaims, pleased by the avowal. "I oughtn't to have gone to town the first day, perhaps; only I was anxious to see Standish about my novel, and to hear what had been doing in the last six weeks. You went for a walk, I hope?"

"What, alone, Herman, in this strange place!"

"Ah, to be sure—you don't know the neighbourhood yet. There are some nice walks—Barnes Common, for instance, not above half an hour's walk from here; and Wimbledon, almost as near; I must show you them next week. And now I'll go and wash my hands for dinner. I've eaten no lunch, on purpose to do justice to our first home dinner."

"I hope it will be nice, dear; but the cook is rather young. However, she seems to understand things, and is very confident."

The table in the Pompeian chamber looks pretty enough, with the fragile modern glass and heavy old silver—the last the Squire's gift to his daughter—when Herman and his wife go into dinner presently; but the dinner itself is a failure, and Herman resents the fact more intensely than Editha would have expected from a poet.

The soles are burned on the outside and pink within; the fowls are the oldest and toughest birds Herman has encountered for some time, and Swiss poultry has not been always young; the ham is half raw, hard, and salt; the pheasants are reduced to a condition in which the flesh crumbles off their bones; the bread-sauce is watery; the gravy is chiefly remarkable for grease, Lee and Perrin, and black pepper; the pastry is a leaden sarcophagus, in which a few half-cooked apples are entombed; the custards are curdled. But happily, before they arrive at this stage of the feast, Herman has spoiled an excellent appetite with a series of disappointments, and has retired within himself.

O, those nice little club dinners—so simple, so inexpensive! The one whiting, crisp and of a golden brown, with his tail in his mouth—delicate symbol of eternity; the longitudinal slice of haunch, roasted by a cook who has elevated roasting to a science. Herman is not so practical as to count the cost of this first home dinner, or he would find the account sadly against domesticity.

Soles	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	£0	2	6
Fowls	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	0	7	6
Ham	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	0	13	7½
Pheasants	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	0	8	0
Gravy-beef, vegetables, eggs, butter, lard, and sundries	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	0	5	0

Total £1 16 7½

His dinner at the club would have cost him three-and-sixpence ; but then he cannot take Editha to a club, and it is an established principle in the British mind that to dine out of doors is adverse to the best interests of domestic life.

"I am afraid you have not enjoyed your dinner, dear," Editha says nervously, when the parlour-maid, who is slow and stately in her movements, has swept the last crumb from the tablecloth, and withdrawn her attentive ear from Mr. and Mrs. Westray's conversation.

"We won't call it dinner, Editha. Everything was simply uneatable. You must tell your cook so to-morrow ; and if she can't do better, you must dismiss her. There must be plenty of good cooks to be had, if you go the right way to work."

Editha sighs. It seems a bad beginning somehow, insignificant as the matter is to her mind. Herman drinks a couple of glasses of claret, conquers a disposition towards ill-temper, and they retire to the pretty little study, where there is a cheery fire on this dull October evening, and sit opposite each other on either side of the hearth like old-established married people, and Editha is happy again.

They talk and talk, having such a boundless stock of ideas to impart to each other, that there seems no limit to the possibility of interesting conversation. Herman expounds his views upon a variety of subjects ; vague dreamy views, tricked out in a halo of sentiment. He tells his wife a little about his day in London ; the people he has met, the news he has heard ; not altogether edifying.

"I'm afraid it is a very wicked world you hear of at the clubs, Herman," she says, shocked to learn that A.'s wife has run away with a Queen's Messenger ; that there is a rumour of a judicial separation between Mr. and Mrs. B. ; that C., after *menant grand train* for the last three years, has appeared in the *Gazette* ; that D. has levanted on account of some unknown difficulty, which may be anything from flirtation to forgery.

"It is the best world we know of, my dear," he answers calmly ; "and we can but make the best of it ; get the most out of it ; give it the least ; trust it never ; hope for little from its generosity ; for nothing from its charity ; and be sure that he who has the biggest beam in his own eye will be the first to spot the mote in ours. Yes, it is a wicked world undoubtedly, and, unluckily for the cause of morality, the wicked people in it are the pleasantest companions and do the kindest things."

"You don't mean what you say, Herman !" exclaims his wife, horrified.

"Some of it, at any rate, dearest," he answers carelessly. "But

I don't want to infect your innocent soul with my time-hardened notions. The world you know is fair enough—that smooth-faced, time-serving world which smiles upon the prosperous and well-placed. God forbid that you should ever test its metal with the acid of misfortune, or discover how the fine gold changes to dross in the crucible of adversity!”

Editha sighs. Worldly wisdom like this seems chilling after Ruth's gentle views of life, overflowing with hopefulness and charity.

“I think if you were to give me a good cup of tea, Editha, I might manage a chapter or two to-night,” says Herman, after a pause, during which he has been looking dreamily at the fire, and tasting the sweets of domesticity. It is sweet to him to sit by his own fireside, with Editha opposite him—to know that she is absolutely his own.

The young wife is delighted at that demand for tea. She rings, and the stately parlour-maid stalks in presently with the urn and caddy, the old-fashioned silver tea-tray, part of Editha's dower, and rosebud cups and saucers; and Editha is prettily busy for the next five minutes, while Herman goes on dreaming. His new book will be a success; his wife's delight in the chapters he has read to her seems to him a good augury. His comedy has been received with rapture by Mrs. Brandreth and her company, and only awaits the seal of public favour. Life smiles upon him as it has never smiled yet.

He has not seen Myra since his return to England. He has had some thoughts of calling at the theatre to-day, his piece being already in rehearsal; but he has shrunk somehow from the notion of his first encounter with Mrs. Brandreth in his character of married man, and has deferred his appearance at the Frivolity till to-morrow, or possibly the day after, or perhaps next week; although he is quite aware that such postponement may result in one or two of his characters working out into something utterly alien to his idea of them, and some of his best speeches being in a manner read backwards.

“I'll write to Myra to-morrow, just to let her know that I have returned, and to give her my new address,” he thinks.

He is anxious about his comedy, but it would be a relief to him if his comedy could succeed without any meeting between him and Mrs. Brandreth.

Kismet is the name of the new play. Modern, domestic, and so far original that its author is unconscious of having borrowed anybody else's ideas.

The cup of tea is perfection, and in sipping that brain-clearing beverage Herman forgets that he has had a bad dinner. He talks

of his book ; his characters, and that awful crisis in their fates which now looms before him in the middle of the third volume ; and thoroughly enjoys himself for the next half-hour. And then the tea-tray is removed, the Sutherland table folded and put away, and the author seats himself at his desk ; while Editha opens her work-basket, and concentrates her attention upon point-lace, or seems so to do, though after every group of stitches she looks up from her work, and watches the thoughtful face of the writer.

By and by she takes a volume of Coleridge—the Aldine edition, portable, clear of type—from Herman's classic bookshelf, and reads. Seated thus, with Herman opposite her, she knows no weariness, though she has read nearly to the end of the volume before the writer looks up from his manuscript at the sound of the silver-tongued clock on the mantelpiece striking two.

"My dearest, what have I been doing to allow you to stay up so long ?" he exclaims. "Your roses will soon fade if you keep me company in the small hours."

"Let me stay, Herman," she pleads. "I am as foolish as David Copperfield's Dora, and I should be glad if I could hold your pens. It is so sweet to me to look up from my book now and then and watch your face, and fancy that I can follow the progress of your story there. Will you read me what you have just written ?"

"Not to-night, love," with a yawn. "You shall read it for yourself in the printer's slips, and tell me the blemishes in my work. And now, wife of mine, I wonder whether your domestic handiness would go far enough to give me a b.-and-s. ?"

The obedient wife flies to the cellaret ; and for the first time in her life Squire Morcombe's daughter opens a soda-water bottle.

CHAPTER XVII.

"'Etait-ce un connaisseur en matière de femme,
Cet écrivain qui dit que, lorsqu'elle sourit,
Elle vous trompe, elle a pleuré toute la nuit ?

* * * * *

Je ne sais si jamais l'éternelle justice
A du plaisir des dieux un plaisir permis ;
Mais, s'il m'était donné de dire à quel supplice
Je voudrais condamner mon plus fier ennemi,
C'est toi, pâle souci d'une amour délaignée,
Désespoir mi-érable et qui meurs ignoré,
Oui, c'est toi, ce serait ta lame empoisonnée,
Que je voudrais briser dans un cœur abhorré !"

Kismet has been in rehearsal a fortnight before Herman makes his first appearance on the dimly-lighted stage, where the actors

are endeavouring to give form and life to his creations, and to infuse some touch of novelty into those well-worn types which the dramatic writer is fain to employ, for want of power to evolve any new order of being from his inner consciousness.

Mrs. Brandreth is on the stage, rehearsing without book, in that low repressed tone with which she keeps feeling and passion in check, reserving her great effects—her fire and force and whirlwind of passion—for the performance. No one ever quite knows what “Brandreth” is going to do till the first night of the new piece; perhaps Brandreth herself least of all. Artist though she is, and carefully as she thinks out and elaborates every character, she is not the less spontaneous. Some of her finest touches of art have come to her at night, before her audience, in a flash, like inspiration. Every movement of the graceful form, every turn of the small classic head, has been studied with deliberation. Yet at the last moment hidden fires flame out, and she electrifies her fellow-actors by some unpremeditated look or action which nothing less than genius could inspire.

Lord Earlswood sits across a chair, his arms folded on the back of it, his chin reposing on his arms, his whiskers drooping languidly. This is the fifth time he has assisted at the rehearsal of *Kismet*. His presence is an infliction which would be tolerated from no less a person than the owner of the theatre. He looks up as Herman comes to the wing, nods, and smiles thoughtfully, with a quick glance at Mira, who, with figure drawn to its fullest height, and scornfully uplifted head, is denouncing the weak-minded lover who has jilted her, loving her all the while, but sacrificing love to worldly wisdom.

His lordship looks from the author to the actress, wondering how they will meet. He has not seen them together since the Ascot Cup-day, when their evident enjoyment of each other's society galled him considerably. He has long ago made up his mind that there is something more than friendship in Myra's regard for the companion of her girlish years, and he is anxious to see how she will take Mr. Westray's marriage. She received the news of it coolly enough, it is true, much to Lord Earlswood's surprise; but then women are so artful, and have such wondrous self-command. The actual presence of the faithless one may be more trying.

The act ends with that outburst of Myra's. Despite her suppressed tones there is a force in her utterance and a meaning in her gestures which thrill the small audience watching her from the wing; and a little burst of spontaneous applause heralds the climax which is to bring down the curtain triumphantly upon act two.

“That licks *Hemlock*, anyhow,” says Lord Earlswood approv-

ingly. "Hang your classical rot! We had enough of that at Eton. We don't go to the theatre to be reminded of our juvenile canings and impositions. There's human interest here, passion, and what's-its-name? How d'ye do, Westray?"

At sound of the name Myra looks round. Pale, wearied with a three hours' rehearsal, she has been for ever so long. If her cheek blanches now, the change is so slight as to escape even the watchful eye of jealousy glancing gloomily upward from beneath the bent brows of Lord Earlswood.

"At last!" exclaims Mrs. Brandreth, as she and Herman shake hands. "I began to think that some one else must have written *Kismet*, and that you had only given us the use of your name for a consideration. You seem to take so little interest in the piece."

"I knew I was in good hands," says Herman.

"He was 'married, and couldn't come.' Haw!" cries his lordship.

"How much of the rehearsal have you heard?" asks Mrs. Brandreth.

"Only the last half-dozen speeches. Nothing could be better. You will be magnificent in the close of that act. How d'ye do, Miss Belormond?" acknowledging that young lady's nods and becks and wreathed smiles.

"How well you are looking!" says Myra, in her friendliest manner; a frankly gracious friendliness that is new to Herman, and which relieves him of certain anxieties that have made this first visit to the Frivolity in some wise a trial. "Switzerland has agreed with you. You look ten years younger than on that delightful day at Ascot."

"And yet I was very happy on that day," replies Herman, moved to gallantry by her kindness. A married man has such an agreeable sense of freedom. He can say the sweetest things with impunity.

"I think we might call the third act for to-morrow," interjects the stage-manager, a gentleman who wears spectacles and his hat tilted on to the back of his head, and has an oppressed and care-worn countenance, as of one whose burden is greater than he can bear.

"Yes," replies Myra; "the first and second go pretty smoothly now."

"Mr. Scruto wants to show you his model for the second act," adds the stage-manager, "if you're not in a hurry to go."

The rehearsal is over, but the actors linger, curious to hear anything that Herman may have to say; not that they intend to accept his ideas, good, bad, or indifferent, having already made up their minds as to their interpretation of his play.

Herman and Myra talk over the comedy, while Lord Earlswood swings backwards and forwards on his chair, and Mr. Delmaine, the stage-manager, roams about distractedly, bawling some direction or question now and then at one of the wings or up to the flies, whence come hoarse answering shouts from invisible sources. Herman's spirits have risen wonderfully since he came in at the stage-door. He discusses his play with vivacity, suggests a good deal, yet avows his supreme confidence in Myra's taste and experience.

They talk of the piece, and nothing but the piece, for some time, and then, having quite exhausted that subject, Myra says, in a subdued tone:

"I must not forget to offer you my congratulations on your marriage. I saw Miss Morcombe with you one night when we were playing *Hemlock*. She is very lovely. You have reason to be proud of her."

"I am proud of her," answers Herman. "She is as good as she is beautiful."

"You will let me know her some day, I hope."

"I shall be very glad," replies Herman; although half an hour ago he would have deemed such an introduction the wildest imprudence. "She is already one of your most enthusiastic admirers, though she has only seen you once."

"I saw how much she was interested in the play," says Mrs. Brandreth; "but I put that down to her interest in the author."

"You did not know—"

"No, but I could see."

Hereupon arrives Mr. Scruto the scene-painter, with his neat little cardboard model of the set for act two. Nothing can be more perfect in its way. It represents the garden of a villa at Nice, with the sunlit sea beyond, and an angle of the villa occupying one side of the foreground. The open windows reveal the pretty *salon* within, and in and out of these windows the *dramatis personæ* are to circulate.

Mr. Scruto's work is praised, a suggestion or two made by Mr. Delmaine, and approved by Mrs. Brandreth, and then the whole business of rehearsal is over. The prompter's boy puts up the call for to-morrow:

Kismet, act three, at 11.
Ladies of the Ballet.

Which latter announcement means that guests are to meander in and out during the last scene of the play. Mrs. Brandreth has a knack of training her ballet ladies to look like real flesh and blood, and even patrician flesh and blood. She shows them how to group themselves,

how to fall into natural attitudes, to sit or stand, to take up one of the showy volumes on a table and seem really to examine its illustrations, to exchange little friendly greetings with one another, and, above all, not to abandon themselves to vacant contemplation of the audience. In the matter of gloves, shoes, hair-dressing, and all small details, Madame Vestris herself could not have been more exacting. "And mind," says the arbitrary Myra, "I will have no lip salve used in this theatre, making your mouths look as if you were in the last stage of scarlet-fever; and no hairpinning."

This last mysterious phrase is fully understood by the young ladies to whom it is addressed. It simply means that the use of a smoke-blackened hairpin, by which some fair coryphées intensify the lustre of their eyes, is forbidden at the *Frivolity*.

The result of this wise tyranny is a happy one. Very fair and fresh are the faces of Mrs. Brandreth's corps de ballet, while many a hard-working young woman learns the elements of good acting from Myra's judicious instructions.

Herman goes home that day with a mind quite at ease. He had dreaded the effect of his marriage upon Myra, weakly and foolishly perhaps, since he was not responsible for any fancies of hers. It is an infinite relief to him to find that she can take matters so easily, and even ask to be presented to his wife.

"It would have been difficult to keep those two apart if I am to go on writing for the *Frivolity*," he muses; "but I don't think now that there's any danger in their meeting. Myra will be sensible enough not to be too confidential with my wife."

He remembers his conversation with Editha on the rocky margin of the Pennant, and he feels very sure that his young wife would not care to accept among her acquaintance that other who jilted him years ago. He trusts to Mrs. Brandreth's discretion, however, and would not for worlds warn her against any revelation of the past.

The first night of *Kismet* comes after three more weeks of laborious preparation, and day and night rehearsals during the last week, and the last two of these full dress, with lights and scenery and properties as on the night of performance. In a word, Mrs. Brandreth rehearses a modern comedy—which pretends to be an intellectual effort—as carefully as a provincial manager of the first-class rehearses his Christmas pantomime.

The plot of the play is simple, but affords large scope for passion. Estella Bond, a girl of humble birth and position, has been engaged to Paul Mortmain, a landscape painter and a young man of family; they have loved with intensity, and have felt themselves intended for each other by fate. The man, by a

sudden turn of Fortune's wheel, has all at once become possessed of large wealth ; whereupon, urged by a worldly counsellor, who shows him that the promised wife of Paul Mortmain, the painter, the nobody, is no fitting mate for Paul Mortmain, master of the great Mortmain estates, he deserts his betrothed, first executing a deed of gift which is to give her independence.

Her first use of independence is to educate herself to the level of her false lover ; her second to transfer the twenty thousand pounds he has bestowed upon her to the Asylum for Superannuated Governesses.

"I have education now," she says, "and can fight the battle of life!"

She seeks an engagement as governess or companion ; obtains one in the latter capacity with Mrs. Wilding, a young widow, residing at Nice ; arrives at the widow's villa, and finds that the widow is seriously disposed to sink that title for wife, the husband in view being Paul Mortmain.

Mrs. Wilding, lovely, weak, aristocratic, and gushing, confides freely in Estella, who, on her part, contrives to avoid encountering Paul Mortmain, till a happy stage accident brings them face to face at the end of the second act, and evokes from Estella a withering denunciation of the man's meanness, a scathing repudiation of his would-be generosity—his twenty thousand pounds, which have gone "to solace the declining days of women who have known enough of the worthlessness of men's love and the hollowness of men's oaths to prefer toil, helplessness, solitude, dependence—ay, starvation—to the bitterness of violated faith and wasted affection."

She pours a flood of angry passion upon her lover's shame-bowed head ; every stage of that long speech, broken only by interjectional remonstrances from the lover, rises in intensity, wavers from scorn to tenderness, from anger to love—yet always mounting in passion—till the final words which bid him leave her, and forget that he has ever loved or ever wronged her, as she from that hour will blot his name and image from her mind. Little perhaps in the fabric of the play : only that skilful use of old materials which marks the originality of the nineteenth century ; but the language is forcible and eloquent, and the acting has the fire of true genius. That second act stamps the success of *Kismet*.

"I said there was go in it," remarks Lord Earlswood, contemplating the ruin of his gloves, which he has split in the storm of applause that greeted Myra's recall. "The fellows in the stalls like to see two women quarrelling about one man. It's agreeable to masculine self-esteem. Haw!"

The third act shows Paul Mortmain's impassioned pursuit of the woman he has wronged. He has been false to his destiny in leaving her. His old fancy about fate has never quite left him. Nothing has gone well with him since his desertion of Estella. His favourite horse has thrown him viciously ; he has taken a fever while electioneering in his county town, and has escaped Death's clutch by the skin of his teeth. Wealth has proved something less than happiness. He now humiliates himself before the woman who once loved him ; but she tells him love died with the death of respect. He is no more to her than the strangers she passes in the streets. Let him marry the lovely widow who adores him.

" Butterflies are fond of flowers," replies Paul. " I would as soon have the butterfly's love as the widow's—their brain-power must be about equal."

" You have wronged me," says Estella ; " you shall not wrong her. You have broken your promise to me ; you must keep your promise to her. Prudence as well as honour demands it. No man can be twice disloyal with impunity."

Estella leaves him in the widow's boudoir, which is the scene of this last act. He seats himself at Mrs. Wilding's davenport, and writes his final appeal to his old love, not without a contemptuous allusion to the volatile widow, who has taken his fancy captive for a while, but never touched his heart. This letter, written with passionate haste, is blotted in Mrs. Wilding's blotting-book. She enters immediately upon Paul's exit, sees the disturbed state of the davenport, the papers thrown about, the pens ruthlessly scattered, and is attracted by the thick black impression on the blotter. " Paul's hand !"

She is curious enough to tear out the sheet of blotting-paper and hold it up to the light, and there reads disjointed sentences of Paul's letter.

He returns just as she has locked the evidence of his perfidy in the secret drawer of the davenport, returns with a letter in his hand, his own, sent back unopened by Estella, who is on the point of leaving for England.

In his anger with his first love he returns to his second. He throws himself at Laura's feet, tells her that in her innocent and gentle nature he has found the balm for an old wound that has pierced deep, but is not incurable—offers her that milk-and-waterish affection which men who have squandered all their wealth of emotion upon the idol of their youth generously bestow on the consoler of their riper years ; but offers it with such fervor and energy as might pass current for genuine passion.

Laura fools him to the top of his bent, hears all he has to say,

and then shows him the blotting-paper. Satisfied with his humiliation, she is generous and womanly enough to help him.

"Estella loves you," she says; "I guessed her secret the day you met—read it in her face. My suspicions had been awakened by her studious avoidance of you, and I brought about that unexpected meeting in order to test you both. I saw enough in those few moments of surprise and agitation to convince me that I had never possessed your heart, that she had never lost it."

She goes on to suggest that he shall pretend to have received a telegram announcing that the whole of his fortune has been engulfed in a bank failure. He shall seem to be reduced at a blow to his old position of dependence on a precarious profession, the exercise of which he has abandoned long enough to have lost much of his old skill—all his old patrons.

He puts this plan into execution with some dexterity, aided by the minor characters, whose comedy enlivens the scene; and Estella, haughty, determined to the last, at the moment of starting for the railway-station, hears that her lover is a pauper, and hears him ridiculed and insulted by Mrs. Wilding, who pretends to exult in his downfall.

This undeserved humiliation moves her more than all. In a noble burst of passion she turns upon Laura, denounces her unwomanly conduct, and then flings herself upon Paul's breast, whereat the happy-dispositioned widow breaks into a peal of rippling laughter, and Estella learns that she has been duped.

So the play—with its light-comedy underplot—ends in everybody's happiness, as a stage-play should end, and Mrs. Brandreth achieves one of those signal triumphs which make an actress's renown.

Editha and her husband have watched the play together, seated side by side in the snug little stage-box, and not once has Herman left his wife throughout the performance, anxious as he may have been to slip behind the scenes and hear what the actors think of the success of each act. He has kept his place by Editha, who has looked and listened almost breathlessly, from the first line to the last, with an anxiously-beating heart. It is the first time she has assisted at any triumph of Herman's, and her cheek glows and her eye brightens as she turns to him at the fall of the curtain.

"I am so glad, Herman," she says, in her low, sweet voice. That is all.

"You really like the piece, dear? That's right. The house is tremendously noisy, isn't it? But these first nights are so delusive. There's an electric current of good-nature circulating among the audience. Even the critics applaud heartily, you see,

and yet perhaps some of them will go home and abuse the play."

Lord Earlswood and Mr. Lyndhurst come into the box to congratulate the author and to be presented to the author's wife, and Herman, whether he likes it or not, has to admit Hamilton Lyndhurst to the roll of Editha's acquaintance. A thing hardly to be avoided anyhow, as Lyndhurst is always to the fore in literary and artistic circles, and is made much of by those very people whose society is most agreeable to Herman.

"Dooood well little Walters plays the widow," says Lord Earlswood; "the first time she's ever risen above your waiting-maid business. Brandreth taught her every bit of business, every look and tone; almost made a lady of her, in short. It was wonderful to see her train that slangy little beggar. That laugh was Brandreth's. She taught little Walters note by note. Finest thing in drilling I ever saw; they used to go at it for a quarter of an hour at a stretch; I heard 'em one morning."

"How clever Mrs. Brandreth must be, and how patient!" says Editha warmly. She is grateful to the actress whose art has helped Herman to achieve success.

Hamilton Lyndhurst looks at her curiously. Herman has just slipped out of the box, and gone behind the scenes to congratulate Myra, as in duty bound.

"Yes, Mrs. Brandreth is clever," assents Lyndhurst, in his tranquil legato tones; "one of the cleverest women in London, and a woman whose genius is always undergoing development. She'll give the world some startling proof of her cleverness before she has done with it."

"I think she has given sufficient evidence of her genius by to-night's performance," replies Editha. "And what exquisite taste she has shown in every detail! Herman has reason to be grateful to her."

"And no doubt is—eminently grateful; authors always are," says Lyndhurst. "There's hardly a manager in London whose dinner-table is not resplendent with the tributary *epergnes* and claret-jugs of grateful dramatists."

"Nice taste in colour, hasn't she?" asks Earlswood, still singing Myra's praises. "Nothing in the draperies or dresses to set one's teeth on edge."

"Pearly grays, changeful opals, amaranth, and primrose—gentle reposeful tints that remind one of Leighton's pictures," says Lyndhurst.

"How do you like the moral of your husband's play, Mrs. Westray?" asks Lord Earlswood. "It has a moral, I suppose?"

"There is no moral, little or big, in the *Iliad*," says Lynd-

hurst, quoting De Quincey. "The greatest works of literary art have been innocent of moral teaching. Mr. Westray's play inculcates no moral, but it illustrates a universal truth. A man can love honestly but once in his life; all after feeling is mere imitation of the first and only genuine passion. The French mind has a knack of telling the secrets of humanity in a touch-and-go proverb: *On revient toujours à ses premiers amours.*"

A look of distress clouds Editha's face for a moment.

"I don't think my husband would agree with you upon that question, Mr. Lyndhurst," she answers gravely.

"And yet he has written *Kismet*, which deifies first love, and degrades a second attachment to mere fancy and foolishness," says Lyndhurst lightly. "I leave you to examine him as to his intentions, Mrs. Westray, and arrive at his real meaning if you can."

Editha listens with a disquieted heart. Has not Herman confessed, with praiseworthy frankness, that his first love has not been given to her? And here in this stage-play of his own writing—and it may be that a man unconsciously and involuntarily reveals his convictions through his art—Herman has shown her that first love is a thing imperishable, immortal as the soul which it illumines with its divine fire.

"Could I ever love any one else as I love him?" she asks herself. "If we were parted to-morrow, and I were to live half a century, would his image ever be faded, or his influence upon my life be lessened? True love is above time or change."

She remembers that her lover has described that first attachment of his as something less than pure love. Here is a loop-hole for hope.

Lord Earlswood retires presently, and follows Herman to the greenroom. Hamilton Lyndhurst remains until Herman's return. He has a knack of making himself agreeable to women of every rank, from a dowager duchess of seventy to a *lionne* of the Château des Fleurs or Jardin Mabille, and he contrives to make his conversation pleasing to Editha in this quarter of an hour *tête-à-tête*. He shows her the notabilities among the audience, an attention which Herman's natural anxiety for the success of his play has prevented his paying his wife. Mr. Lyndhurst knows everybody, and can say something amusing about everybody—not always the most good-natured thing that can be said of a fellow human creature, but always said with an easy good-natured air, which takes the sting out of sarcasm.

Editha listens with a certain interest, yet with some degree of constraint. Mr. Lyndhurst belongs to that new world to which her husband has admitted her; a world in which all man's loftiest

feelings and moral qualities seem absolutely at a discount ; a world in which to be clever and get the better of one's neighbour appears the one positive virtue ; a world in which every man and woman exists for his or her own exclusive benefit, and bends every faculty to one relentless pursuit, individual advantage ; a world in which every traveller glides along a single line of rail to his own particular terminus, and regards the comfort and well-being of all other wayfarers as a question remote from the purpose of his being, a subject upon which philanthropists may squander their superfluous energies, and by means of which loud-mouthed agitators may bring themselves into notice.

Herman comes back to the box looking radiant. The actors are delighted with the piece, and pronounce it a greater success than *Hemlock*.

"You shall have your victoria next week, darling," he whispers to Editha.

Carriage or no carriage is a question that has been discussed between Mr. and Mrs. Westray more than once during the last three weeks. Herman does not like to see his wife deprived of a luxury to which she has been accustomed. Editha pleads on the side of prudence. She is anxious to be a prudent, economical wife, and she feels that existence in the Fulham villa is more expensive than it ought to be, and that her notions of house-keeping, as illustrated in her dealings with Jane the cook, are somewhat weak and shadowy.

Herman is in such good humour with all the world that he forgets his old idea of Mr. Lyndhurst as an acquaintance to be dropped after his marriage, and invites that gentleman to dinner.

"Come to us to-morrow, if you've nothing better to do," he says ; "I've asked Mrs. Brandreth. She is dying to know you, Editha. To-morrow will suit you, I suppose, won't it dear ?"

"To-morrow is Sunday, you know, Herman."

"Of course. Sunday is the only day she can come to us. I hope your cook will manage to give us an eatable dinner ; or perhaps it would be better to go to the Star and Garter. It would be a pleasant drive down to Richmond, wouldn't it, Lyndhurst ?"

"The Star and Garter by all means, rather than inflict trouble upon Mrs. Westray," replies Lyndhurst. "Let the dinner be my affair as well as yours, Westray ; and we may as well ask some more people. Little Miss Walters, for instance—a most amusing beg—a very estimable young lady, Mrs. Westray—and Earlswood. He'll be awfully savage at being shut out if Brandreth comes."

"I asked Earlswood just now. He comes in any case."

Editha turns to her husband with that serious look of hers which impressed him at their first meeting—that expression which he then called strong-mindedness.

“I shall be very happy to receive your friends in our own house, Herman, even on Sunday,” she says; “but I certainly would not go to an hotel to dine upon a Sunday evening.”

“Don’t you think that’s a distinction without a difference, Mrs. Westray?” asks Lyndhurst. “You are fond of social straw-splitting in the country. However, I, for my part, shall esteem it a greater honour to dine with you in your own house than anywhere else.”

“So be it. Seven o’clock to-morrow then, Lyndhurst. You know Bridge-end House?”

“Perfectly.”

“We’re almost neighbours of yours, by the way.”

“Within a stone’s throw.”

Mr. Lyndhurst accompanies Mrs. Westray to her carriage, and watches it depart.

“She reminds me of Clarissa Harlowe,” he says to himself, as he stands waiting for his brougham, “and is at least a century behind the age she lives in. But she is just the one fresh, fair, unspotted, and perfect woman it has been my lot to meet. For such a woman as that I would ‘turn virtuous, and eschew cakes and ale.’”

“I wish we could avoid Sunday dinner-parties, Herman,” Editha says gently, as they drive away from the theatre.

“We can’t, dear, while we live in civilised society.”

The honeymoon is over, and the husband answers with marital authority.

“We’ll go to Long-acre on Monday, darling, and choose your carriage,” he says gaily, putting his arm round his wife’s waist.

“Dear Herman, it is so good of you to think about it; but I can do very well without a carriage. And unless you are quite sure you can afford it—”

“I can afford it easily. The success of *Kismet* will put hundreds in my pocket; and instead of walking about the dull old Fulham lanes, you shall drive in Hyde Park, or to Richmond or Wimbledon.”

“What is the moral of *Kismet*, Herman?” Editha asks irrelevantly.

“Moral, my dear! I don’t think there is a moral.”

“Yet it seems to mean, Herman, if it means anything, that a man can love only once. Paul thinks he is cured of his first love, but the end shows that first love is destiny.”

"Of course. When it is real love, like mine for you."

"But I am not your first love, Herman. You have confessed as much."

"I have confessed that you are not the first woman who ever seemed charming in my sight; not the first woman I ever made love to. But you are the first I have ever deeply and really loved."

"Are you sure of that, dearest?"

"Very sure. As sure as I am that we can afford a victoria, and that the wretched female who calls herself a cook will spoil the dinner to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"The happiness of life is made up of minute fractions—the little, soon forgotten charities of a kiss, a smile, a kind look, a heartfelt compliment in the disguise of playful raillery, and the countless other infinitesimals of pleasurable thought and genial feeling."

HERMAN'S prophecy about the dinner is not unrealised. Jane the cook has not been dismissed abruptly, as he desired. She is a young person of eminently respectable appearance, who seems good-natured, and anxious to please. She has wept at any allusion to warning, and appealed to Editha's soft-heartedness. She has declared piteously that no former master ever complained of her cooking, and she has thrown the burden of all her shortcomings upon that mute offender, the kitchen-range. No one—not a professed cook at seventy guineas a year—could send up a decent dinner from such a range. It is a range of demoniac inconsistency, and will roast the joint to a cinder and leave the poultry half raw. It will send up stony-hearted potatoes, and reduce cauliflowers to a watery pulp. It will dry macaroni to chips, yet hardly afford heat enough to penetrate a pair of soles.

Jane declares with tears that the range is preying upon her mind, and that she can't sleep for thinking of it. The parlour-maid, who happens to be Jane's first cousin, sustains her relation's statement. "Them open ranges ain't a bit of use, num," she says. "You scarcely see 'em anywhere's now, since the kitchingers have come up." So Editha informs her husband that she fears they will never get on without a new kitchen-stove, though with

inward wonder how the great open fire at Lochwithian had contrived to cook everything so nicely, with aid from the charcoal hot-plate only on state occasions; and Herman, ever careless about household trifles, calls at Molding and Korness's *en passant*, and tells them to send him in the best thing in kitcheners. The article is out of their line, perhaps, but they can order it from the proper people.

The kitchener being set, with a good deal of dirt, muddle, and general upheaving of the kitchen department, proves itself curiously imitative of the superseded range. The potatoes still exhibit a tendency to stony-heartedness; the cauliflowers are still pulpy; the soles make up in grease what they want in cooking.

Editha gently suggests that the looked-for improvement has not yet shown itself.

Jane has recourse to the corner of her white apron—a very clean girl, Jane, in the matter of aprons—and protests that no master ever was so hard to please as Mr. Westray.

“But really, Jane, the fish was underdone. I tried to eat it myself, but couldn’t.”

“You see, mum, a new kitchener never works quite right; when I get to know my stove it will be different. Leastways, if master has got the right kind of stove. I can’t say as I quite hold with this one.”

Happily for Mr. and Mrs. Westray, their guests upon this particular Sunday evening are not people who care very much whether their dinner be good, bad, or indifferent. Lord Earlswood is entirely without gastronomical taste or refinement; Hamilton Lyndhurst is learned in the nicest shades of high-art cookery, but is able, when he finds himself face to face with a badly-cooked dinner, to suspend his appetite in a manner, satisfy the mere cravings of nature with the wing of a fowl and his dinner-roll, and put off the actual process of dining till to-morrow; Mrs. Brandreth is too *spirituelle* to care for the pleasures of the table; and Barkly Tollemey, the dramatic critic, who completes the small party, is an intellectual giant, who takes whatever is set before him in the way of meat or drink with a serenity which is the distinguishing characteristic of himself and his writing.

Myra has never been more charming than on this occasion. There is a repose in her manner which is different from the received idea of a comedy-actress. She wears black velvet, high to the throat, with ruffles of old guipure. A pearl pendent, and a single pearl in each small ear, are her only ornaments. In this dress her graceful figure and aristocratic head appear to perfec-

tion, and Editha thinks her handsomer in this softly-lighted room than last night in the glare of the footlights.

The two women get on pretty well together on this first meeting, though they have few thoughts in common. Editha thanks the actress for her exquisite impersonation of Herman's heroine, and they talk a good deal of his dramatic works, past, present, and to come. But of the past—of those youthful days when she and Herman were playfellows, neighbours, friends, and ultimately lovers—Myra says not one word. Time enough to speak of that unforgotten past when the hour for such revelation ripens. To-night Mrs. Brandreth obtains credit for tact and kindly feeling by this wise reticence. Any allusion to his early manhood would have been painful to Herman, and he is grateful to Myra for her discretion.

Mrs. Brandreth contemplates the small household with an eye that notes every detail. The ill-cooked dinner, the slow service which lengthens its humiliation, gratify her angry soul; for she sees Herman's irritation, and knows that such petty vexations are sometimes strong enough to weaken the bonds of love. She sees Editha's woe-stricken look when the turkey poult crumbles off his bones under the carving-knife, as if he had been discovered at some banquet-table at Pompeii, and lapsed into dust at exposure to the upper air. She notes the many small annoyances which vex the husband, the secret anxieties of the wife, and tells herself that life's honeymoon is over.

"Foolish people!" she thinks. "If they lived at an hotel and dined at a *table-d'hôte*, they might go on being turtle-doves for the next ten years. But servants and an ill-managed house will estrange them more surely than the treachery of false friends."

Dinner once done with, its manes appeased with a glass of marschino or chartreuse, and a bottle of burgundy circulating among the four gentlemen, the evening is pleasant enough. Mr. Tollemey is in good form, and talks metaphysics in a manner which delights Herman and sorely puzzles Editha. Where, in that region of abstract thought to which Mr. Tollemey soars after his second glass of chambertin, is there a place for the simple creed which has made life—and the dim world beyond life—so sweet to her thoughts, so easy of comprehension, so straight and clear and good? That Mr. Tollemey talks well, and that Herman and he understand each other, she knows; but when she tries to follow them, she feels like one lost in some shadowy wood, where unclean things lurk among the undergrowth, and may start out upon her at any moment.

Lyndhurst tries to interest her, but fails. She is listening to Herman. In her abstraction she forgets that it is time for her to

rise, until, looking across at Mrs. Brandreth, she sees a shade of weariness on that lady's face, Lord Earlswood's conversation not being particularly interesting, and is reminded of her duties as hostess.

The two ladies retire to the drawing-room, where numerous wax-candles twinkle gaily in crystal sconces against the walls, and where there is abundance of old china, photographs, and flowers to admire, Herman being in the habit of bringing home pretty things, and not being thoughtful enough in financial matters to consider that these perpetual droppings of stray sovereigns and five-pound notes will wear away the most substantial income.

Again the talk is of Herman and dramatic art. The open piano suggests music, and Editha plays a sacred air of Mendelssohn's with perfect feeling. Mrs. Brandreth declines when asked to play or sing.

"I know no sacred music," she says. "I fear you would be shocked if I were to sing a French ballad or a German student's song, and those are the only airs I have at my fingers' ends."

Editha does not say she would not be shocked, so the subject drops, until the gentlemen appear, when Lord Earlswood pleads warmly for Chaumont's famous ballad, "*La première Feuille*," and, Herman entreating also, Mrs. Brandreth apologises to Editha, and sings deliciously that most bewitching of *chansons*.

The gentlemen implore her not to leave the piano till she has sung something else, and she obeys with a pretty deprecating air, and sings a fine patriotic song, to be found in books of *Volkslieder*, "*Des Deutschen Vaterland*." She sings it with a dash and spirit that delight her auditors. Mr. Tollemy's gray head waggles enthusiastically over the piano, and the four gentlemen join in the chorus:

"O nein, O nein, O nein!
Sein Vaterland muss grösser sein!"

When Myra has risen from the piano, Hamilton Lyndhurst seats himself unasked, strikes a few chords, and sings a little love song of Shelley's in the noblest baritone voice that Editha has ever heard. Song is Mr. Lyndhurst's one gift, and he possesses that gift in a superlative degree. Few professional singers of the day who would not fear such a rival. While the deep rich voice dwells on the sweet sad words, with perfect enunciation of every syllable, Editha forgets that it is Sunday evening, and that Shelley is a bard who would hardly find a place among *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.

Lyndhurst looks up at the fair grave face, and sees that rapt look, which bespeaks a listener with a soul for melody.

"Come," he says, "I'll sing something better than Shelley for you, Mrs. Westray."

He sings "Rock of Ages," as that sublime hymn has been rarely sung in a drawing-room; sings as with religious fervour; sings with a simple intensity of feeling that brings a flood of tears to Editha's eyes. He sees her turn away and hide her face in her handkerchief, and smiles gravely to himself as he bends over the piano, playing the closing chords softly, slowly, with a dying fall. And not a note more will he sing to-night, though Myra entreats for a song of Blumenthal's.

"There's comfort still, she is assailable," he says to himself.

It is after midnight when the guests depart, and when Herman comes back to the drawing-room he finds Editha standing by the piano with a thoughtful face.

"Herman," she begins, with ever so slight a tremulousness of tone, "I must ask you not to give any more Sunday dinner-parties. I always went to evening service at Lochwithian, and I should like to do the same here. Will you mind very much if we dine at six o'clock on Sundays, and invite our friends on any other day than Sunday?"

Herman shrugs his shoulders. He sees that his wife is very much in earnest. That strong-mindedness he dreaded has come out already. He remembers what Dewrance said about their unfitness for each other, and has an uncomfortable feeling that they are on the threshold of their first quarrel.

"My dear love," he says, "to deprive me of the right to invite my friends on Sunday is to sever me from some of my pleasantest associations. There is Tolley, for instance, one of the cleverest men I know, and a most valuable ally. You'll see how *Kismet* will be reviewed in the *Day Star* to-morrow. Now Sunday is Tolley's great day for dining with his friends. He prefers the *sans gêne* of his club on week-days."

"And are we to profane the Sabbath, Herman, because Mr. Tolley likes dining out on that day, and will praise your play in the *Day Star*? Isn't that buying his good word at the price of principle?"

"I was not brought up in Glasgow, and have no Sabbatarian leanings," answers Herman, pale with anger. "As for influencing Tolley, you don't know what you are talking about. He is a man whose society is only too much in request, and who does me honour when he consents to eat an ill-cooked dinner in my house. By the way, that woman must go to-morrow, Editha, if you wish me to dine at home."

"If I wish you to dine at home! Herman, how can you say that? It is not very much that I ask—only that we may have no more Sunday dinner-parties. When I thought of the peaceful Sunday evenings at Lochwithian, the quiet little church, the simple, earnest congregation, Mr. Petherick's kind voice and thoughtful teaching, full of faith and hope, and all that is brightest in religion, and heard you and Mr. Tollemey talking of that last book which has tried to argue Christianity into a fable, I felt as if I had fallen from a happy God-fearing world into the company of sceptics and infidels."

"My dear Editha, if you would think more of the dinner and less of the after-dinner conversation, you would be a better wife for a literary man who has his way to make in the world," replies Herman, stifling a yawn as he lights his chamber candle. "I wonder what the *Day Star* will say of *Kismet*?"

CHAPTER XIX.

"Felicity, pure and unalloyed Felicity, is not a plant of earthly growth; her gardens are the Skies."

THAT first difference of opinion—it can hardly be called a quarrel—ends as such disputes usually do between newly-wedded lovers. Each surrenders a little. Herman promises only to invite people on Sunday when hard pushed by circumstances. Editha promises to find a better cook, but stands like a rock to attendance at Sunday-evening service at the grave old parish church. Jane Tubbs departs, tearful and reproachful to the last, casting the burden of her sins on the kitchener; and Ann Files comes in her stead, after a charwoman, suggested by the housemaid, has come in to clean the numerous corners, cupboards, and secret places in which Miss Tubbs has accumulated all the dirt and broken crockery that has accrued during her reign. Three out of six of the Etrurian beer-jugs are carried off in the dustcart with other fragmentary delf; and on the first morning of her service the new cook informs Editha that there isn't a pie-dish or a pudding-basin in the place, that the bread-pan is cracked, and that there isn't a dish belonging to the kitchen dinner-service that doesn't leak, "along of letting 'em stand too long in the oven," explains cook.

Cook number two is stout and middle-aged, a matron of eminently respectable appearance. She is a considerable improvement upon the last functionary in culinary skill, and contrives to send up savoury little dinners which do not offend Herman's educated senses. This is an unspeakable relief to Editha, who has grown to regard dinner-time as the baneful hour of every day. She has yet to discover that this treasure of culinary art has a hungry family circle residing in an adjacent lane, and deriving their chief sustenance from Mr. Westray's kitchen. Jane Tubbs contented herself with wholesale wastefulness and the liberal entertainment of an extensive circle of acquaintance; Ann Files robs more systematically, introduces a more orderly system of expenditure, and therefore appears more honest. Those differences in the weekly bills which have perplexed Editha no longer occur; but the bills are uniformly heavy.

"We seem to eat a great deal of bread, Files," Editha remarks, blushing.

"Yes, mum; both the young women are hearty eaters, and I know you wouldn't like me to stint them in *bread*," replies Files.

"Of course not. I should be sorry for them to be stinted in anything."

"To be sure, mum. Any lady would," rejoins the cook, with dignity, as one who has a nice perception of what a lady's feelings ought to be. "As for me, if the baker never comed it wouldn't make much difference; half a slice at breakfast is all I trouble the loaf for."

This is not unveracious, Mrs. Files preferring malt to wheat, and taking her nourishment from the beer-barrel rather than the bread-pan.

That housekeeping is a very expensive business, Editha has not been slow to discover. She pays her bills weekly, and is precise and careful in the inspection of the tradesmen's books, yet somehow everything seems to cost a great deal more than it ought. There is never anything left from the late dinner that can be made available for the kitchen next day. Joints resolve themselves into "pickings" for those voracious housemaids' supper; a hash is not to be thought of; curry the housemaids cannot eat; "and I shouldn't like to put a curry made of twice-cooked meat before master, mum," says Files, conscientiously; "it would seem like imposing upon him."

A beefsteak-pudding for the early dinner swallows four pounds of steak. The loins of pork that Editha has paid for under the régime of Jane Tubbs would have kept an eating-house going. Ann Files affects nice little bits of corned beef, which never

appear as less than nine shillings in the butcher's book, and are never to be heard of next day. Groceries of all kinds disappear in the same proportions, and there is a heavy demand for eggs, butter, cheese, and bacon. Candles are lively, and flour is never dull. Editha, without exactly supposing that she is being robbed, has an uneasy sense that the housekeeping expenses are much heavier than they ought to be. She has to ask Herman so often for money; and the sums he gives her—always liberal—seem to melt through her fingers. She wonders how her father can have contrived to support that great household at Lochwithian, and no longer marvels at those occasional bemoanings on the subject of finance which have rippled the calm current of home-life at the Priory.

Herman is unconsciously a cause of expense. He has a habit of saying, when his dinner does not particularly please him, "My love, couldn't you give me a wild duck now and then?" or, "My dear, I saw quails at the Roscius yesterday. Let us have some quails;" and Editha will give any price the poulterer likes to charge for the birds Herman fancies. He likes an omelet for breakfast, and on the strength of these omelets, Ann Files takes in two shillings-worth of eggs daily.

Herman is now able to invite his friends to dinner without enduring tortures as each dish is placed on the table; but the cost of these little dinners is awful. Ann Files is a disciple of that French artist who could reduce half a dozen hams into an essence to be contained in an ounce bottle. A shin of beef, two knuckles of ham, and one of veal barely suffice for the small tureen of clear soup which begins the banquet. True the clear soup is good, but still better is the noble mess of beef *à la mode* which Ann Files's sister-in-law carries home with her that night, in a spoutless beer jug, under cover of the darkness; and savoury are those nice little shanks of ham which Ann Files's brother discusses at breakfast next morning. The Fulham confectioner's entrées at seven and sixpence and half a guinea are dirt cheap as compared with Ann Files's veal olives—a small dish whereof necessitates the sacrifice of half a fillet of veal—or those mutton cutlets which can only be put on the table at the cost of a whole neck of mutton.

"I uses the scrag and all the orkard bits for my gravies, you see, mum," explains Files; notwithstanding which the article gravy-beef figures like a running accompaniment to the joints in the butcher's book.

Nothing ever remains over at these banquets, however small the party. It would seem as if Mrs. Westray's guests reversed the order of things, and adapted their consumption to the supply.

But this phenomenon of total evanishment Mrs. Files is able to explain in a simple and rational manner, when interrogated timidly by Editha.

"That young man as comes to wait, mum, and a very respectable well-conducted young man he is; no flirting nor nonsense with the young women; but as for appetites, I never see anything like it. The supper that young man eats, after he's taken in the tea and coffee, would astonish you. And it's customary to give them their suppers off the dishes as leave the table, which I'm sure you wouldn't like me to do less than is usual; besides which, if you balked him that way, he'd be putting his fingers into my dishes, and nibbling of 'em outside the dining-room door."

"O, the man must have his supper, of course," says Editha.

"I'm very glad we've no footman, Herman," she remarks that evening, when she and her husband happened to speak of domestic matters; "the way that young man Moiser eats is really dreadful."

"You mean the fellow that waits. He's a very decent waiter, that fellow, moves about quietly, doesn't rattle the spoons or jingle the glasses. Let him eat as much as he likes, dear, and don't you worry yourself about it. By the bye, what a charming little dinner you gave us last night! We are improving in our housekeeping."

"I'm so glad you think so, Herman," Editha says, brightening; "but I'm afraid these little dinners are very expensive."

"Of course, dear; everything that's worth anything costs money; but they must be much cheaper at home than anywhere else. In the matter of wines, for instance; that moselle we were drinking last night would be fifteen shillings a bottle at Richmond or Greenwich, and it only stands me in seven and sixpence."

"O Herman, will you send in a little more moselle, please? I put out the last half-dozen bottles yesterday."

"What, the six cases gone already?"

"Yes, dear; your friends drink so much at dinner. I used to put out three bottles for a small party, but Moiser told me he was obliged quite to stint people, and pretend not to see when they looked at him to have their glasses filled; so now I put out five or six, and there is never any left."

"I daresay Moiser has a liking for moselle," answers Herman, carelessly. Sitting drowsily by the fire in that snug little study of his, he has just hit upon a happy idea for the third volume of his novel; and a man who has a happy idea cannot be expected to throw his thoughts out of gear for the sake of an odd bottle of wine.

And thus domestic life glides on, pleasantly if ruinously. Are not most of the roads to ruin pleasant? Editha is so happy in seeing Herman pleased with his dinner and satisfied with his breakfast, that she commits herself almost unquestioningly to Ann Files the cook; whereby the family in that adjacent lane rejoice greatly, and sundry visiting acquaintance of Mrs. Files, and of Mary Ann the parlourmaid, and Selina the housemaid, have a good time in Mr. Westray's kitchen.

"If one can't have one's young man to supper once in a way, one might as well live in the Black Hole at Jamaica," remarks Selina to Mrs. Files.

"I've always been one to stand by my family," says Mrs. Files, after despatching half a sirloin to her kindred in the lane, "and when I'm out of place I've always a home to go to, and no call to hurry myself about getting a situation till I can suit myself to my own satisfaction."

The victoria is chosen, and the prettiest pair of horses the Westminster-road can produce are bought to draw it, after much deliberation and consultation, and several exhibitions of their performances before a select party of friends. Herman thinks he has done rather a clever thing in going to the Westminster-road for his cattle, instead of giving the West-end prices for the same. A victoria will not serve to convey Mrs. Westray to dinner parties or theatres, so a miniature brougham has to be added. Horses, carriages, harness, livery, and those etceteras in the way of dandy brushes, carriage ladder, boot-top paste, leathers, and sponges, which are more alarming to the minds of the uninitiated than the larger items, make a hole in one of Herman's loose thousands; so large a hole, in fact, that very little of that particular thousand remains after all is paid.

As a set-off for this vanished thousand he has the satisfaction of seeing his wife in a properly-appointed carriage as belits the wife of a popular writer; and Editha has the delight of calling for her husband at his club three or four times a week, and driving round the Park with him on their way home. Hyde Park has a flattish, dullish look to this daughter of mountain and flood, but to drive with Herman is not the less Elysium. The heart creates its own landscape, and true love can be happy in a garret, or within the gray walls of a debtor's prison.

So the days go on—drear November—chill December—Christmas at Lochwithian, where there is gladness and love inexhaustible for the young wife—frosty January—biting February—blustery March—sweet, vernal April. The trees burgeon and blossom in gardens and Park, the labourer leaves his fireside, the keels of the pleasure boats glide down the bright blue river, and

one can fancy that the nymphs and graces dance lightly in the violet-perfumed woodland under the clear spring moon. Herman and Editha have been wedded more than six months, and feel quite old married people. Indeed, to judge by the amount of crockery that has been broken, and the way the edges of the table-knives are notched and turned, they might have been married six years.

Not yet has Ruth come to visit her married sister, anxious as Editha is for that happiness. The winter has been somewhat severe, and has tried Miss Morcombe sorely. She is not so strong this year as she was last, and Dr. Price advises against any extra exertion just at present. In the summer, perhaps, she may be equal to the journey from Lochwithian to London.

The Squire runs up to town in April, and spends a week with his daughter and son-in-law, and highly approves of their snug little establishment.

"Hope you're not going too fast, Westray," he remarks sagely. "Mustn't look upon your literary earnings as certain income, you know. Fashions change—new lights appear. That's how Goldsmith and Sheridan and Scott, and such fellows, always contrived to outrun the constable."

"If Sheridan's wife had been as prudent as Editha, he would never have come to grief," replies Herman. "She won't even order a gown from a French dressmaker, for fear she should ruin me."

More than once Editha has suggested that Herman's sisters ought to be invited to the villa.

"It would be a pleasant change for them, dear, I should think," she says.

"Perhaps it might, love; but it wouldn't be a pleasant change for me," returns Herman frankly. "The fact is, I've outgrown my sisters. They were always older than I, and the progress of years has aged them more than it has aged me; so that the gulf between us widens. In plain words, they have grown a trifle priggish; take me to task about my books; wish that there was a higher purpose underlying my stories; tell me what Mr. Symcoks, the curate, thinks upon the subject of my latest fiction; regret that I should waste my mental powers upon the composition of worthless, evanescent plays; and make themselves altogether disagreeable. No, love, we are too happy in our union to admit any jarring element. We'll send the poor old girls as many presents as you like—music, books, hair-pads, ribbons, silk gowns—but we'll maintain an equable two hundred miles between them and ourselves."

"Isn't that unkind, Herman?"

"I daresay it is, dear, but it's wise. The goddess of wisdom never was remarkable for her amiability ; but she knew a thing or two. Devonshire is the place for my aged sisters. I'd as soon invite the three old ladies with the sewing machinery—I mean to say the spindle and shears institution—as those amiable spinsters."

The cheerful and congratulatory period of the new year has brought in Messrs. Molding and Korness's account for the furnishing of the domestic nest ; an account which in bulk and neatness of caligraphy looks like a lawyer's brief, and the sum-total of which takes Herman's breath for a moment or so, like a header into a December flood. He had no idea that taste was so expensive an item in upholstery. That artistic simplicity, that classic chastity which distinguish Bridge-end House are as costly as any splendour of gilding and crimson brocade which a retired citizen could have chosen for the adornment of his brand-new mansion at Canonbury or Hoxton. Every one of those small devices, which seemed to Herman so clever and inexpensive, figures in Messrs. M. and K.'s account as an important item. Not an inch of ebonised beading, not a bracket or a curtain-loop, but is separately entered.

Herman puzzles over the pages of that account as if it were an essay of Herder's, but he cannot question the precision and honesty of a bill which so rigidly sets out its smallest item, so carefully describes and identifies every object charged for.

He folds up the document with a sigh. The payment of Messrs. Molding and Korness will make a clean sweep of that little capital of which the successful author boasted to Squire Morcombe when he asked for Editha's hand. It will leave Herman shoulder to shoulder with Fortune once again, instead of being a few thousands in advance of necessity. He has been prospering since his marriage. *Kismet* has brought him a great deal of money in a very short time ; his novel has been eminently successful, and he is well on with another comedy and another fiction. Henceforth he will be able to afford himself briefest repose from his labours, for, in the words of the greatest of English philosophers, he has given hostages to Fortune. Yet he sees in the wife he loves no "impediment to great enterprises," as Lord Bacon calls this tender tie, but rather an incentive to ambition. Before summer has faded from the land he hopes to be a father ; sacred name, which thrills him with a strange, sweet pride and gladness ; holiest of all names given to man, since it is the name man gives his God.

Happy beyond all measure is that spring-time of their wedded life, despite the dissipation of Herman's little capital and the

necessity for unremitting work. The young husband devotes all his leisure to his wife. He buys a boat, and keeps it up the river at Teddington, whither they can drive on balmy April afternoons, dine at a little waterside inn, and row up to Hampton or Halliford after dinner, driving home late in the moonlight. Editha is never so happy as when they are quite alone together; and as the spring ripens to summer, the little dinners, at which Mr. Tollemy and other literary lights are entertained, cease for the most part, and Herman and his wife spend their evenings in the garden, he smoking and dreaming, with an occasional lapse into conversation, she reading to him sometimes—she reads beautifully, and it is one of her delights to administer to his pleasure in this way—or working with dexterous fingers at miniature garments of cambric or lawn, which look as if they were intended for that fairy page about whose small person Titania and Oberon quarrelled.

The young wife, worshipping her husband as only a single-minded, unselfish woman can worship the imperfect clay to which destiny has mated her, has yet contrived to hold firmly by certain simple rules of her maiden life. She attends all those services of her church which she has been wont to attend, and not even Herman's convenience or inclination, paramount over all lesser things, is allowed to interfere with her performance of this duty. She contrives to do some good in her immediate neighbourhood—visits the dirty cottages in the dirty lanes; sends small gifts of broths and groceries to the sick and aged; strengthens the feeble knees with help material and spiritual; and earns the gratitude of the vicar of her district, whose highest pride it is to call himself a parish priest, and who is never weary of labouring for the welfare of his flock. And these suburban parishes are not easy to manage. They have all the vices of town, and all the ignorance of the country. There are old men and women in those lanes who have never been to London—marvellous as the fact may appear that people can remain supine and incurious with the mightiest metropolis in the world at their elbow—yet the vices of London have come down to them: the artifice, the shiftiness, the plausibleness, the intemperance and greed of the metropolitan pauper, are to be found among these incurious Fulhamites, who, having “never had no call to go to London,” have not troubled themselves to make the journey.

Dewrance dines now and then with Mr. and Mrs. Westray, and is surprised and honestly glad to see them so happy.

Summer comes, and in the late summer the fruition of Herman's hopes. A baby son is put into his inexperienced arms in

the dim dawn of an August morning, after a night of watchfulness and anxiety; and he feels that he is verily pledged to the inscrutable goddess Fortune, and that his hand had need be busy and his brain prolific, for the sake of wife and child.

In reality, the wife and child would be but a light burden upon his industry, if he had not cook and housemaids, nurse-maid, coachman and horses, wear and tear of stable utensils, breakage of pudding-basins and other kitchen sundries, grease-pot, servants' relations and followers, to provide for as well.

CHAPTER XX.

"Side by side thus we whisper; 'Who loves, loves for ever,'
 As wave upon wave to the sea runs the river,
 And the oar on the smoothness drops noiseless and steady,
 Till we start with a sigh,
 Was it she—was it I—
 Who first turn'd to look back on the way we had made?
 Who first saw the soft tints of the garden-land fade?
 Who first sigh'd, 'See, the rose-hue is fading already'?"

EIGHT months more of Herman Westray's wedded life have come and gone since that August morning. The London season is at its height; the Frivolity is crowded nightly; Mrs. Brandreth is more popular than ever, delighting the town in a comedy which is not Herman's. His last effort, produced in the late autumn after his son's birth, has been that gentle failure which kindly critics call a *succès d'estime*. One of his rivals has followed with a clever adaptation from the German—domestic, tender, simple, almost arcadian—and the pretty fancy has taken the town, much to Herman's disgust. The *chefs-d'œuvre* which secure success for our rivals seem to us such flimsy things. We could have done them ourselves easily, if the central idea had but happened to strike us.

Piqued and disappointed at this humiliating turn in affairs, he is working savagely at a new play, in the progress of which Myra is warmly interested; so much so, that he spends most of his leisure afternoons just now in the elegant little drawing-room of one of the small old houses in Kensington Gore, to which Mrs. Brandreth has removed from sober Bloomsbury. The success of the Frivolity, now firmly established as a popular and

fashionable theatre, amply justifies some expansion in the lessee's surroundings ; and Mrs. Brandreth's victoria is the prettiest to be seen in the Park ; and Mrs. Brandreth's small Sunday dinners are as perfect in their simple, unpretentious fashion as dinners can be. She does not astonish her guests with peaches before strawberries have fairly come in ; but her wines are exquisite, her *menu* has always some touch of novelty, and she never fatigues her friends by too elaborate a banquet.

Her house is altogether one of the pleasantest in London. She knows only clever people, and eschews the Philistine element. The mercantile and ponderous classes are unrepresented at that cosy round table, where art and literature meet in the freedom of a friendly Bohemianism, which never degenerates into vulgarity or recklessness of speech. Mrs. Brandreth is about the last woman whom any man possessed of the least *savoir faire* would be likely to offend by lack of due reverence for her sex. The very fact that she stands quite alone in the world, and is known to have been superior to any temptations which Lord Earlswood's wealth could offer, gives her an additional claim upon the respect of her circle. She is not fast, or loud, or insolent. There is an easy grace about her manner, with a touch of languor when she is not warmly interested in the topic of the moment—a languor which some people mistake for pride.

She has altered her mode of life considerably since Herman's marriage ; it may be her steadily increasing success, or it may be some change in her own nature. She is fonder of society than of old, reads less, is less alone. She takes more pains to cultivate acquaintance likely to assist her professional advancement ; goes more into the world ; seizes and occupies a more important position in society ; works her hardest to be *grande dame* as well as popular actress.

Herman sees the difference, and wonders at it, almost with envy. He has spent his small fortune, and has not found it possible yet awhile to replace those few thousands which melted so easily in his first year of wedded bliss. Myra is growing rich. She has invested her surplus judiciously, under the direction of Hamilton Lyndhurst, who guarantees a safe six per cent. upon all such investments. It seems to Herman that in the race of life his old playfellow is getting ahead of him. Her fame is perhaps greater than his, although a trifle less enduring ; for however worthless the next generation may account his books, the books will exist in some form, if only to be despised, and afford some record of himself ; while the actress's renown can be no more than a tradition.

For Editha this second year of wedded life is not quite so

happy as the first. True that she has her boy for the tender care and delight of her days,—a dawning intelligence which expresses itself as yet only in half-articulate babblings or monosyllabic utterances which the young mother puzzles out as earnestly as if they were fragments of an inscription on the crumbling wall of a temple dug out of the banks of the Euphrates. To amuse him in his waking hours, to watch him when he sleeps, to nurse him in his small ailments, to take him for airings in the victoria, form the new joys of her existence; but even this happiness cannot make up for the loss of Herman's society, and of him she sees much less this year than last.

The spring is well advanced, and they have had but one boating excursion, and even that one was not unalloyed bliss, for Herman was self-absorbed and inclined to be irritable, taking objection to the east wind, the cockney oarsmen who menaced the safety of his boat, and the lukewarm condition of the stewed eels at the hotel where they dined.

He works harder than last year, and with less pleasure in his labour. He is nervous and excitable, and there are times when Editha's quiet presence in his study seems to worry and disturb him. Her watchfulness has discovered that he writes less fluently of late; that he throws himself oftener back in his chair to meditate; bites the end of his pen moodily for ten minutes at a time; runs his pen across a page of copy with a vexed, impatient air; in a word, finds it difficult to please that most indulgent of all critics, himself.

The flying pen which has been wont to travel over the paper with electric swiftness, driven by thoughts too rapid for mortal hand to keep pace with, now drags along heavily, with only spasmodic spurts now and then to relieve its sluggishness. Editha makes up her mind that Herman is over-worked, and tells him so, earnestly imploring him to give himself rest, to pause in the composition of his novel, to postpone the production of his play. The suggestion is to the last degree unwelcome to him. His vanity is quick to take offence.

"You've been influenced by the twaddle in that last review in the *Censor*. I believe they keep those articles standing, and only alter the names of the books and authors, and shift the positions of the paragraphs to make them look fresh. You think I have written myself out?" he says irritably. "Then I suppose that last chapter I read you seemed flat and dull; had a faded air, eh?"

"Not in the least, Herman; it was lovely, but I am sure you want rest, for all that. You write so much more slowly than you used."

"Perhaps I write a good deal more carefully."

"Ah, to be sure; I never thought of that. To my mind you have always written so well that I cannot imagine more care being needed. But I daresay your next novel will be better than anything you have written yet."

"I hope it may," says Herman, moodily, thinking of his empty coffers, and that some of the Christmas accounts—wine-merchant, corn-merchant, Fortnum and Mason—are still outstanding; and that he has been respectfully solicited more than once to send a cheque. The next stage after respectful solicitation is a lawyer's letter.

That play which progresses so slowly—some alteration or amendment being suggested by Mrs. Brandreth at each reading—is a thorn in Editha's side. Herman is now rarely at home on Sunday evening. Editha ventures a faint remonstrance one day.

"Our Sunday evenings used to be so happy last year," she says. "You went to church with me very often, and we used to have such pleasant walks afterwards up the hill to Wimbledon Common in the starlight."

"Arcadian and delicious, dear. We'll have just such walks again when my play is finished; but for the moment business is paramount with me. I must make a success at the Frivolity before the season is over. But if you don't like my leaving you, why don't you come to Kensington Gore with me on a Sunday? Mrs. Brandreth is perpetually asking me why you won't come."

"You know how much I dislike Sunday visiting, Herman."

"In that case you must not object if we sometimes spend Sunday evening apart."

"Sometimes, Herman!"

"Sunday is Mrs. Brandreth's only disengaged evening, you know," adds Herman, ignoring the somewhat reproachful exclamation.

"Herman, don't you think it is a sin to devote Sunday evening to secular business? It seems to me that no blessing can attend any work which involves the desecration of the Sabbath."

"My dearest, we don't look at things from quite the same point of view."

"Indeed, Herman! I fancied we both thought alike upon great subjects, even if we have different ways of acting in matters of detail."

Long as they have been married, all-confiding as they have been to each other, Herman has contrived to keep his religious opinions very much to himself. Editha has thought him lax, but she has never supposed him an unbeliever in that creed which is to her the very foundation of her life. He knows this, and feels that they are treading upon dangerous ground.

"My dear, the amount of business that I get through at one of Mrs. Brandreth's Sunday evenings is so small that it need scarcely trouble you."

"And yet you cannot spare me one of those evenings?"

"Well, you see, there is always something. I talk over what I have written with Mrs. Brandreth, and hear her opinion. She has a happy knack of hitting upon ideas as to situation and stage effect. No outsider can have any idea how the success of a play hinges on these details. Some jokelet which seems utterly inane when one sees it in black and white will set the gallery in a roar, and keep the house in good-humour for a whole evening. And then I meet useful people at her house—critics, newspaper-men, fellows who can give me a lift now and then. You see, as you don't like me to invite them here on a Sunday, it's an advantage for me to meet them at Myra's."

Editha looks up suddenly, startled by that familiar mention of the actress, and Herman reddens.

"I beg Mrs. Brandreth's pardon for speaking of her by her Christian name," he says. "I hear her old friends call her Myra. Curious name, isn't it?" he adds carelessly; "Myra—not by any means a pretty one."

"Yes, it is curious," Editha murmurs thoughtfully.

That utterance of another woman's Christian name has given her quite a shock. Ridiculous, of course, that she should be so weak-minded. She is ashamed of her own folly.

"I hope I have not a jealous nature," she says to herself, wondering at that sudden pang which shot through her heart for so slight a cause.

But after this she takes a dislike to the Frivolity Theatre and all its associations. She is troubled by Herman's attendance at Mrs. Brandreth's Sunday receptions; he dines in Kensington Gore on many Sundays, and she eats her dinner alone, or countermands the dinner altogether, as a superfluous ceremony, and takes a cup of tea and an egg before going to church. Lenten Sundays these, in every sense. The preacher moralises upon the vanity of human wishes, the brevity of earthly happiness, and she feels that of all the congregation his words come home to her heart most keenly. After church she goes up into her baby's nursery, and sits with him while the nursemaid has her evening out; sits beside the dainty little brazen cot, chintz-curtained and befringed, which Messrs. Molding and Korness have supplied for the heir of all the ages and nothing particular besides; sits reading the *Imitation of Christ* or Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living*—that wondrous mixture of spiritual truth and shrewdest worldly wisdom; sits for hours reading her good books by the little one's

pillow, and only pauses once in a way to wonder how Herman is amusing himself at Kensington Gore.

"Could she take a bird's-eye view of Mrs. Brandreth's drawing-rooms, how that gentle heart would be wounded! The front room—by no means large, and a little overcrowded with those various elegant trifles, Sèvres flower-stands, brass-mounted stereoscopes, majolica card-trays supported by chubby Cupids, which enthusiastic admirers have offered as respectful tribute to the popular actress—contains as many people as can find standing room. There is a buzz of conversation, which effectually drowns the classic performance of a German composer at the small marqueterie cottage-piano; but what can people expect if they will play Chopin-and-water with the soft pedal down at a fashionable At Home? The critics are assembled in full force, revelling in the discussion of various late fiascos in literature and art, or according loud and enthusiastic praise to the last delight of the critical mind, some literary weakling, self-conscious as Narcissus, whom the critics adore as an intellectual Hercules.

The inner drawing-room is too small for anything but an oratory or a shrine, and here, in the lowest and most graceful of Louis-Quinze chairs, in a half-reclining attitude, languid, reposeful, picturesque, sits Myra Brandreth, dressed in her favourite black velvet and rose point—the one costume which becomes her to perfection, and which she is too wise to lay aside for the arbitrary varieties of fashion. The square-cut bodice reveals the graceful throat; the century-old lace veils the fair neck, and gives a Madonna-like purity to the dress. Small diamond earrings and a yellow rosebud fastened in the bosom of her dress are Myra's only ornaments. Her large black fan is painted with pale yellow roses, and dangles from her wrist by a pale yellow ribbon.

"How fond you are of yellow!" says Herman, who alone with the priestess occupies this luxurious sanctuary, half hidden from the occupants of the adjoining room by the deeply-drooping amber curtains, and just large enough to contain a jardinière, a coffee-table, and three easy-chairs.

"Yes, I like the colour; perhaps because it is not a general favourite."

"The colour of jealousy, of amaranth and asphodel, the chosen flowers of death."

He is leaning over her chair playing with her fan, furling and unfurling it perpetually for his own amusement. If gentlemen never so amused themselves, fans would be everlasting wear.

"Death and I are very good friends," replies Myra, with a sigh. "I have so little to live for."

"Why, I thought you had everything in the world that can make life worth living—fame, success, money, a profession you adore."

"Yes, I am very fond of acting. That and music are the only arts which take one out of oneself."

"In your case I should have fancied self so agreeable a subject that you would hardly care to be carried away from it. I should have supposed you had not a care or a sorrow."

"Herman!" she exclaims, turning her dark hazel eyes upon him slowly; they are at their softest to-night, with a veiled look which is almost like tears. "You ought to know me better than that."

He remembers another Sunday evening long ago, and a certain question of Myra's, together with the reply he made thereto; remembers with a faint sigh. Would it not have been more generous, would it not have been wiser, to accept what was then offered him? Infinitely wiser than to be hankering after it now, assuredly; but this reply an unobtrusive conscience does not suggest to Mr. Westray.

Would it not have been wiser to have returned to his old love two years ago, to have accepted the gem that was offered to him—not quite a flawless gem, it is true, but with a wonderful sparkle about it? These Sunday evenings at Kensington Gore are so pleasant; Myra's little dinners so much more *recherchés* and various than the little dinners at home, which are apt to repeat themselves. And life is made up of small pleasures; it is an infinite series of nothings. High principles and noble thoughts are like Alpine peaks, very grand and very beautiful to contemplate from a distance; but easy manners and exquisite taste in details are the castors on which the armchair of life runs easily over the carpet of the world.

Myra and Herman talk of old times now and then—talk of the dead-and-gone fathers whom they both loved; and are drawn very near to each other by these tender memories.

"Have you been to Colehaven within the last few years?" Myra asks.

"Not since my mother's death. I used to run down pretty often in her time."

"I have not been there since my father died and Mrs. Pompion came to fetch me away," says Myra. "It is not for want of love, but for want of courage, that I have never been to see my father's grave."

And then somehow Myra tells the story of her marriage, in her own highly-picturesque representation of which event she appears as the victim of Mrs. Pompion's worldliness—not to say cruelty.

"She made me understand that I was homeless and penniless, and that I should be doing her a wrong by prolonging my dependence upon her an hour longer than I was obliged."

"You might have found independence with me, Myra," is the reproachful suggestion.

"Yes, and blighted your career at the very outset," replies Myra, who remembers perfectly well that at this stage of Herman's life his sole means were represented by a scholarship and 50*l.* a year from his father.

"Poor Charley!" she sighs; "I never loved him, but he was very good to me."

Lord Earlswood cuts short these somewhat sentimental conversations now and then by precipitating himself through the curtained archway, and planting himself upon the one available chair. Having very little to say for himself when so planted, he seems slightly in the way. He is painfully jealous of Herman, yet has no ground for complaint, having, in fact, no status. Society in general in the Kensington Gore drawing-rooms is aware of his lordship's jealousy, and of Mrs. Brandreth's sentimental affection for the author; and "poor Lady Earlswood" and "poor Mrs. Westray" receive a due amount of somewhat scornful pity.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Aussi se permit-elle alors de protéger de petits jeunes gens ravissants, des artistes, des gens de lettres nouveau-nés à la gloire, qui niaient les anciens et les modernes, et tâchaient de se faire une grande réputation en faisant peu de chose."

HERMAN'S novel brings him some hundreds, and enables him to pay wine-merchant and corn-merchant and reëstablish his balance at his banker's; but not to save a sixpence. He has acquired extravagant habits, lives among extravagant people, and has that noble recklessness about trifling expenditure which seems the distinguishing characteristic of a superior mind, and which brings so many superior minds to the workhouse. The unheeded pence run away with their big brothers the pounds, and Herman's *menus plaisirs* are almost as costly as Ann Files's hungry relatives. His cigars are the choicest that money can buy, and he has always a liberal supply at the service of his friends. He never touches cards, and boasts of that negative virtue as an

example of the prudence which befits a family man ; but he spends a good deal of money upon hansom cabs, and a good deal more upon bric-à-brac, indulging his artistic taste to the uttermost when he sees anything worth carrying home to the nest at Fulham. Sometimes he takes Myra a Vienna cup and saucer, rich in costliest gilding, or a Charles Théodore *déjeuner* ; for is he not under considerable obligation to that lady for his dramatic successes ?

These small gifts are the pabulum of friendship. Does not sage Cecil counsel his son to give many gifts, but small ones, to his patron, if he would be constantly remembered ?

The balance at Herman's banker's diminishes with alarming rapidity, and he is just beginning to contemplate a serious reformation in his habits ; indeed, on one of those happy evenings when he seems to return to his old self, he goes so far as to announce this virtuous intention to his wife. Never before has he spoken to her of money matters, but has allowed her to suppose that his resources are in a manner inexhaustible.

"I'll tell you what it is, Editha ; I mean to turn over a new leaf," he says, as she sits opposite to him in the little study by the cheerful evening fire. The April sunset reddens the sky above the flat fields of Fulham, the gray twilight creeps over asparagus-beds and cabbage-gardens, the baby lies in his mother's lap chuckling and crowing at the fire, and lifting up his small muffled feet to be played with by his admiring parents. Quite a domestic picture, and curiously contrastive to last Sunday evening in Kensington Gore.

"In what way, dearest ?" asks the fond wife. "Not to work so hard, I hope."

"Quite the contrary, dear. To work harder than ever, and to turn miser. I can't be too careful or too anxious about the future now I've this little one to think about, to say nothing of the procession of brothers and sisters who will naturally follow his footsteps. I shall leave off cigars henceforth."

"O Herman, you are so fond of your cigar !"

"A pipe is ever so much better."

"You can't smoke a pipe at your club, dear."

"Then I shall spend so much the less time at my club."

"And so much more at home ! Ah, Herman, I shall be grateful to your pipe if it brings about that result !"

"And then there's the money I waste in hansom cabs ; quite a little fortune for Master Squaretoes here, if it were to accumulate at compound interest. I shall give up cabs and take to walking. Nothing so bad for a man's heart as the perpetual friction of locomotion in which he is only a passive agent."

Virtuous resolves, so pleasant a subject for conversation by the evening fire, inspired by the companionship of wife and child; but the next time Herman is in a hurry to get to Kensington Gore he hails the smartest hansom on the stand, and gives the man double fare for driving him at the rate of twelve miles an hour.

Early in May the new piece is produced to a brilliant audience, and is a positive success. With this stroke of fortune all Herman's good resolutions melt away. He has but to write to be rich. There is a bottomless gold mine in his ink-pot. He thinks of Sir Walter Scott, who, at nearly sixty years of age, in a brief span of herculean labour, earned by his pen the almost incredible sum of 100,000*l.*; and he believes that for him, too, literature will be an ever-flourishing pagoda-tree, whose golden fruit he can pluck to the end of his days.

He is intoxicated by the enthusiastic reception of his new play, coming after that odious *succès d'estime*, and his gratitude to Myra for her invaluable suggestions and her admirable acting is boundless. He buys a sapphire locket out of the first proceeds of the drama—antique, classical, expensive—and with his own hands hangs it upon Mrs. Brandreth's fair throat. He takes home a snowy-plumed hat for baby the day after, and Editha's eyes fill with tears at the thought that he should have considered the little one.

"And now that the play is produced, dearest, we shall have our old Sunday evenings again, I hope," Editha says gently.

"Yes, love, I can give you some of my Sundays now. But I am going to put a new comedy on the stocks directly, and I shall want to consult Mrs. Brandreth now and then. She has such a masterly knowledge of dramatic effect."

"How I envy her the delight of assisting you! It seems as if she were almost a partner in your work."

"Not quite, dear," answers Herman, with a supercilious smile; "but her advice is useful upon all technical points. And then her house is one of the pleasantest I know. One meets such nice people there."

"If you could only bring the same *peuple* here, Herman!" says Editha, with a sigh. She would do anything except sacrifice principle to have her full share in her husband's life, and she feels with a pang that it is slipping away from her somehow. Jealous of Mrs. Brandreth in the vulgar sense of the word she is not, for her mind is too pure to imagine evil. But she envies Myra those gifts which render her society valuable and her house charming to Herman.

"Not so easy, my love. We are farther from town—objection

number one. The people who go to Mrs. Brandreth's will drive a mile and a half, but don't care about driving three miles. Then you set your face against Sunday receptions—objection number two. The people I meet at Mrs. Brandreth's like Sunday visiting."

"Could we not have an evening once a week, on which your friends could come to you in an unceremonious way, Herman?" suggests Editha timidly. "Dinner-parties are so expensive, and we have quite enough of them already. But perhaps if these people you like so much knew that you were at home on a particular evening, they would come to us."

"I thought you were too much wrapped up in baby for that kind of thing; we've been degenerating into domesticity since that young gentleman's arrival. However, perhaps it's not a bad idea. I'll get you some cards printed, and we'll have our weekly reception—say Tuesday evening; music and conversation, tea and coffee, light wines, sandwiches. Dr. Johnson says that no man, however intellectual, likes to leave a house exactly in the same condition he entered it. Human nature requires some sustaining element, if only sherry and sandwiches."

Editha is delighted, for this arrangement will give her at least one evening in the week on which she will be sure of her husband's society.

Mrs. Westray's Tuesday evenings, in a certain unpretentious way, are a success. Kensington and Chelsea are rich in artists and literary men, and these are Herman's favourite companions. The distance is easy between Fulham and these abodes of art and letters; painters, playwrights, poets, and their natural enemies and boon companions the critics, rattle down to Bridge-end House in hansoms, and walk home in a merry band by moonlight or starlight, sometimes ever so long after midnight has struck from the two grave old churches whose towers stand dark and square against the sky, like twin warders of the river.

Very merry are these evenings, very full of mirth and wit, nights to be remembered—verily "society;" curiously different from the stately interchange of civilities among the little-great of suburb or country town, who disseminate dulness at measured intervals, and call it "visiting."

The buffet in the little Pompeian dining-room is always liberally furnished. Herman's den serves as a smoking-room, and is sometimes crowded to suffocation with noisy disputants, who can talk louder here than in Mrs. Westray's drawing-room, where the wives are comparing notes about babies with Editha, and repeating the last *mot* from the nursery. Some of the wives and sisters are musical, and there are songs and sonatas and an occa-

sional glee—"See our oars with feathered spray," or "From Oberon in fairyland"—to diversify the evening's entertainment. Curious-looking foreigners, whom Herman picks up at his club, come down occasionally, and draw strange and subtle harmonies from the Broadwood miniature grand. But conversation is the great feature of the assembly. That never flags. Samuel Johnson and his chosen circle never discussed a wider range of topics, never soared to the immensities or descended to the trivialities, with bolder wing than Mr. Westray and his friends. Barkly Tollemey often exhibits his tall figure and wise gray head among the younger guests, and discusses the various problems of a phenomenal universe with Herman, or gives utterance to the most scathing criticisms with an unctuous humour that makes the sharpest words seem sweet as honey. Editha has left off listening to the metaphysical arguments. She is happy in having Herman near her, in seeing him pleased and amused, and in knowing that at least for this one night in the week his own house is as attractive to him as Mrs. Brandreth's. True there are people who go to the popular actress who never come here—distinguished members of the patrician order, who think it a favour to be presented to the popular manageress of the Frivolity; famous doctors, famous lawyers, who like to relax the tension of the bow in Myra's pretty drawing-room, and to have their last pet anecdote laughed at by the favourite actress; while Herman, being only an author, is but little sought by the great. But he has the society he likes best, and is satisfied.

The Bordeaux and light German wines, the chicken and anchovy sandwiches, the effervescing waters and old cognac, the tea and coffee and pound cakes and Presburg biscuits, consumed at these weekly réunions cost something; but Editha is too pleased with Herman's pleasure to count the cost, and so life glides on calmly, almost happily, for the young wife, despite those melancholy Sunday evenings when her husband is planning a new play at Kensington Gore.

Among the most constant guests at Mrs. Westray's Tuesdays is Hamilton Lyndhurst. He is such a near neighbour, as he tells Editha, and it is easy for him to drop in. Indeed, he has not waited for the institution of these weekly receptions to become a frequent dropper-in. He has spent many an evening in the little Dutch drawing-room—with its green-damask walls and old delft jars and quaint tulipwood cabinets—furnished after a Dutch picture.

He has contrived somehow to make himself a friend of the family, to subordinate all those characteristics which Herman observed in him at the beginning of their acquaintance, and to

get himself, in a manner, rehabilitated in his friend's esteem. Before his marriage Herman had made up his mind that Lyndhurst was one of those desirable bachelor acquaintances who ought to be buried in the grave of a man's bachelorhood; but since his marriage he has come to think that Lyndhurst is a very good fellow after all, with rather too much audacity in expressing his opinions among men, perhaps, but a man of kindly feeling and genuine good-nature, and with a perfect appreciation of good and pure-minded women.

To Editha Mr. Lyndhurst has succeeded in making himself eminently agreeable. He has dropped-in when husband and wife have been alone together in Herman's study, and has contrived to fall into that small domestic circle without causing a break in its unity. He can talk well when he likes, he sings and plays exquisitely, and seems never so well pleased as when Mrs. West-ray asks him to go to the piano. That musical genius gives him an elevated air in Editha's mind; she cannot imagine evil in a man who can interpret the great classic composers with such divine expression, and whose deep, pathetic voice rises in power and grandeur with the grandeur of his theme.

CHAPTER XXII.

“Aus dieser Erde quillen meine Freuden,
 Une diese Sonne scheint meinen Leiden;
 Kann ich mich erst von ihnen scheiden,
 Dann mag, was will und kann, geschehn.”

THE Tuesdays have been established for nearly two months—the London season is over. It is Sunday, late in July, the July of 1870. The Franco-Prussian war has begun, and neutral England is breathless and excited to fever-point, watching that awful contest, and prophesying darkly as to its upshot. Editha is thinking rather sadly of an approaching visit to Lochwithian with her boy; sadly because Herman pleads his literary work as a reason for staying in London, while she goes alone to exhibit her first-born to the fond and admiring eyes of his aunt and grandfather.

“But surely, dear Herman, you could write better at Lochwithian,” she pleads, when first this bitter fact of his preferring to remain in town is made known to her; “the pure air, the quiet—”

"My dearest, pray sink that absurd notion about rustic tranquillity. Dogs barking, cocks crowing, guns firing—your father coming in to propose a ride—Mr. Petherick bursting in upon us with the news of some startling event in the village—Betsy Jones has had a letter from her brother in America—or Polly Evans's little boy has set fire to his pinafore. And then there is the temptation which the smiling green hills, and the busy, babbling water-falls, and the glad blue sky, are always offering a man to go out of doors and be idle and happy. I never could stay long within four walls in the country."

"But think what good rest and mountain-air would do your health, Herman," replies Editha anxiously.

"My love, it is not a question of health, but of getting my book finished within a given time," he answers, somewhat impatiently. "I can work nowhere so well as in this little room. Molding and Korness may have charged rather dear for their notions of comfort, but they have certainly succeeded in making me comfortable. This den is the dearest place in the world, and when you and the little one are here, a domestic Eden."

The tender speech, coming upon her in the midst of her disappointment, moves Editha almost to tears. She takes up her husband's hand and kisses it.

"Dear hand, which works so hard for baby and me!" she exclaims.

Herman draws her to him with a sigh.

"Dear love, I have worked hard enough, but perhaps I have not been quite so prudent as I ought to have been. I am not saving money, and a man who has given hostages to Fortune should have his modest share of the Three per Cents."

"But you are not in difficulties, Herman?" Editha inquires anxiously.

"No, dear, not in difficulties," he answers, with a faint gulp, as if conscience were swallowing a pill. "I am only a little anxious about your future and the little one's if—if anything were to happen to me; like poor Mandeville for instance."

Mandeville is a writer of promise who has perished untimely, leaving a wife and children, and not so much as a scuttle of coals or a bundle of firewood in his house.

"Herman, don't talk of such a thing!" cries Editha, pale with agony at the suggestion that her beloved is mortal.

"No, dear, it is not a thing to talk about; but it is a thing that a man can't help thinking about now and then, when he looks in the faces of his children and remembers how brief a journey it must be for them from his deathbed to the work-house."

"Then we are living beyond our means, Herman!" exclaims Editha. "Why did you not tell me this sooner? I will do anything, dear—economise in any way you like—send away one of the servants, or two even—remove to a smaller house."

"My dearest, I don't want to advertise to the world just yet that I am a failure. This house suits us to a nicety. Your present cook seems a very decent person. All I have to do is to stick close to my work, and to go on being successful. I shall be afraid even to speak seriously to you, darling, if you take fright so quickly."

"I am only distressed to think that you should have worked so hard, and that we should have squandered all your earnings upon servants and dinner-parties, carriages and horses. We can get rid of that last expense at any rate, Herman. You bought the carriages and horses to please me. I can do without them very well indeed, dear—so you can sell them as soon as you like."

"You don't know what you are talking about, love. A man may buy horses and carriages—some people even go so far as to consider that an improvident proceeding—but he can't sell them. That means throwing his money into the gutter."

"But to get rid of the expense of keeping them, Herman; that would be an advantage, even if you lost ever so much by selling them."

"When ruin is staring us in the face we'll think of it, dear," answers Herman carelessly, but with a touch of weariness in tone and manner, like a man who feels himself overweighted in the universal handicap.

It is not from lack of love for wife and child that Herman shrinks from accompanying them to Lochwithian. He has a sense of anxiety which makes him recoil from the idea of rural tranquillity and calm autumn days. He is overworked, and knows it; yet is anxious to write faster than ever—to achieve some striking success, dramatic or literary, in order to be once more in advance of Fortune. He is glad to avoid the risk of friendly and confidential converse with the Squire, who might ask him searching questions about his affairs. A certain irritability, which has been growing upon him of late, seems to find its best solace in the intellectual atmosphere of his club, or Myra's drawing-room, which is only an elegant reduction of club society; the same men, the same subjects of conversation, the same tone of being ever so far in advance of the foremost rank of commonplace humanity.

The thing which Herman Westray feels most keenly—perhaps the lurking cause of his fretfulness and discontent—is that in-

vention begins to flag, or even to fail. The crowd of images, the wealth of incident, the variety of subject, which used to throng the chambers of his mind, inhabit there no longer. He is obliged to resort to other men's invention for suggestions that may assist his wearied fancy, and with this view reads innumerable French and German novels, in the majority of which he finds agreeable varieties of stories that have been told a hundred times before, and in the residue no stories at all. Seldom now can he give himself up to the study of those great masters of style, whose imperishable works used to be the delight of his leisure. Actual leisure he has none, and his days of absolute weariness and exhaustion he employs in groping for some available notion in the kennels of continental fiction—a novel which he can condense and crystallise into a drama, or a drama which he can develop and widen into a novel. This sense of the absolute need of incessant work is his excuse to himself for letting Editha pay her home visit alone. That pained and disappointed look of hers haunts him long after his announcement of this intention, but, though it grieves him sorely, it does not induce him to alter his plans.

So Editha leaves the gray old church on this late summer evening more out of spirits than she has felt for a long time. All through the bright, busy London season, when her husband has spent so much of his time away from her, she has looked forward to the autumn visit to Lochwithian, consoling herself with that sweet home picture of the idle days they are to spend together in the fair harvest month. She has spanned the gulf between the dreary present and the happy future with hope's golden bridge, as the sea-king in the old German ballad bridged over the waters that severed him from his earth-born love. Thus the disappointment is more bitter even than disappointment is wont to be, and all through this evening's sermon, in the fading summer light, she has been taking a despondent view of life, and agreeing heartily with the preacher, who quotes the wise saying of Sir Thomas Brown to the effect that this world is not an inn, but a hospital.

Alone in the declining light she leaves the old church, and returns to the home which seems so empty without Herman. He is dining at Mrs. Brandreth's, where he is to meet some new star in the literary heaven—an American poet, whose wild, strong verse has caught the English ear with its vigorous melody. She might have gone with him, she knows, had she so chosen, and can therefore hardly consider his absence an unkindness. Yet she feels that the early sweetness of their wedded life is gone, and that she can scarcely be first in her husband's thoughts when he holds

it too great a sacrifice to give up a Sunday dinner-party for her sake. She makes her sacrifice uncomplainingly for the sake of principle, for the faith in which she has been brought up, whose simple rules and ordinances seem puritanical to Herman's easy way of thinking.

A gentleman is waiting at the little gate of Bridge-end House she approaches—a tall and large gentleman, with dark eyes, and a face which, although not so young as it has been, is still eminently handsome.

"How do you do, Mr. Lyndhurst? Have you been ringing?" Editha asks, as she shakes hands with this evening visitor.

"Two or three times," replies Lyndhurst carelessly; "but your people seem afflicted with temporary deafness. I daresay they are watching the steamers. There's generally one aground for two or three hours on a Sunday evening hereabouts—amusing, rather, for the spectators. The grounded ones usually sing hymns or dance the varsoviana, I believe, to beguile the time. You never heard of the varsoviana, perhaps, Mrs. Westray. It is a dance known in the dark ages, before the Indian Mutiny, and still affected by the lower classes." And so talking, Mr. Lyndhurst follows Editha into the house, the parlour-maid having been recalled to a consciousness of her duties by this time.

The house has a deserted look on this summer Sabbath evening. The light is dying in the saffron west, and the corners of the room are shadowy.

"Don't ring for lamps on my account, Mrs. Westray," says Lyndhurst, as Editha lays her hand on the bell. "This July twilight is delicious."

"Yes, there is a lovely calmness in this faint gray light," she answers, seating herself in a low chair in the balcony, which at this season is like a part of the room. "But it is rather melancholy, at least when one is—"

"Already disposed to sadness?" hazards Lyndhurst.

"I did not quite mean that. When one is alone."

"True," he answers gravely. "Solitude is only tolerable to the man who has nothing to regret. Nay, for the man who does regret there is no such thing as solitude. His loneliness is peopled with phantoms."

Editha sighs. Her lonely hours have their ghost. They are haunted by the memory of happier days.

"You are thinking of leaving town soon, I suppose?" asks Mr. Lyndhurst. It is the stereotyped question just now.

"Almost immediately. Baby and I are going to Wales next week, to stay with my father."

"Baby and you, and baby's papa, of course," remarks Mr.

Lyndhurst, with supreme innocence, having only yesterday at his club distinctly heard Herman say that he was too hard at work to take his wife into the country.

"No, I am sorry to say Herman is not able to go with us. He is so anxious about his literary engagements. He has a commission for a new comedy, to be produced early in the winter."

"At the Frivolity?"

"No. His last piece is likely to run for a year, I believe."

"He is lucky in having such an actress as Mrs. Brandreth. Wonderful woman; gifted in every way."

"Yes, she is very clever, and very fascinating."

"Charming, isn't she? Artificial of course. She would never have taken such a brilliant position if she were not artificial. And when art is so delightful, why should one languish for nature."

"She struck me as spontaneous in her acting."

"Yes, she has her sudden flashes of passion, like Edmund Kean. But underlying all that seems spontaneous there is a mathematical knowledge of effect. She can calculate the force and pressure of her art to a hair. Curious that a simple girl, brought up, not amongst the lamps and sawdust, but in a quiet Devonshire village, should develop into such an artist."

"Devonshire!" repeats Editha curiously. "Does Mrs. Brandreth come from Devonshire?"

"Didn't you know that?"

"No, indeed. I had no idea that she was a countrywoman of Herman's."

Lyndhurst looks at her for a few moments thoughtfully, as if he were weighing some question in his mind, and then replies in his most careless tone. He might tell her something about her husband's past which would sting her to the quick; but it strikes him that the time is not yet ripe for him to impart that piece of information. He has his fuse ready, whenever he cares to use it, but is in no hurry to spring the mine.

"Well, I am not sure that she is a native, but I know she was brought up in the West of England. Are you fond of the drama, Mrs. Westray? Do you like your husband to write for the stage?"

"I like him to be successful in his art," she answers, "and to follow the natural bent of his genius. But I sometimes think that he would be happier if he wrote only books. He is too anxious for the success of his plays, too much elated by triumph, too much depressed by failure. A book can afford to wait for praise and recognition, but a play—"

"Assails Fortune like a highwayman, demanding your money

or your life," says Lyndhurst, laughing. "I always pity the unhappy author on those brilliant first nights, when all intellectual London is on the alert, quite as ready to hiss a defeat as to applaud a success. One sees the wretched being who has set the puppets in motion writhing in the stalls, or smiling with a dolorous smile at those jokes which he thought would set the house in a roar, and which nobody sees. How flat his impassioned speeches seem to fall—what weaknesses he sees in the fabric of his play to-night, which never struck him at rehearsal! How keenly those agonised eyes of his examine the faces of the critics, inscrutable as the Sphinx! And when a man in the gallery laughs in the right place, he could hug that man in a gush of gratitude. No, Mrs. Westray, I do not envy the dramatist his rare triumphs. Your husband must be working rather too hard, by the way, when he cannot afford himself an autumnal holiday, were it ever so brief."

"Yes," answers Editha with a sigh, "it has been a great disappointment to all of us. I think even baby understands, and is sorry papa is not going into the country with him."

"Intelligent baby! I suppose the little one is not on view so late in the evening? I should have liked to see what progress he has made since he and I made friends in the early summer."

Mr. Lyndhurst on one of his friendly visits has been introduced to baby, and has contrived to fascinate that young member of the household. There are men whom children, horses, and dogs are attracted to; not always the best men, perhaps. Is it not rather a question of animal magnetism than superlative virtue, this influence which man exercises over the lesser brutes?

"Baby has been fast asleep for ever so long, I hope. Herman is dining with Mrs. Brandreth, to meet Mr. Molony, the American poet. I wonder you are not there."

"Mrs. Brandreth was kind enough to ask me, and her Sunday evenings are charming. But there are times when one is not quite in tune with that kind of thing; times when a solitary ramble in the lanes about Wimbledon Common is better than brilliant society and a file-firing of epigrams. I enjoy half-an-hour's quiet chat like this more than the loudest roaring of Mrs. Brandreth's literary lions."

"It is good of you to enliven my solitude for a little while," replies Editha, who is really cheered by this friendly talk in the twilight balcony, and whose innocence has no knowledge of Mr. Lyndhurst's evil repute. She knows he is her husband's friend, and accepts that fact as a certificate of character. "I wonder you do not go to Mrs. Brandreth's for the sake of the music," she adds. "Herman tells me there is often first-rate music."

"Some of the best, doubtless; but do not think me egotistical if I confess that I would rather play one of Beethoven's sonatas to myself, in a half-dark room like this, than hear it performed a great deal better amidst the half-whispered chit-chat of a parcel of people of whom about one in ten knows what is being played, while one in twenty cares about it."

"You play so well that you can afford to say that."

"I think I should feel it if I could not play at all. I would hire some half-starved professor—an unappreciated genius—to play Beethoven and Mozart for me between the lights, while I smoked my pipe. Music to the man or woman who cares for it is better than opium-eating. Your true musician sees as many visions as were ever beheld by Coleridge or De Quincey."

"If he starts with as rich an imagination as Coleridge or De Quincey. A man's own mind must create his dream pictures. Opium or music can only set the machinery in motion."

"True, Mrs. Westray. In that case I am not without imagination. I know there are times when my fancy is a daring one."

Something in his tone, which sinks to deeper earnestness with this last sentence, might give the alarm to a woman of the world; but to Editha it conveys nothing beyond the idea that Mr. Lyndhurst has more sentiment, or even romance, in his composition than she has given him credit for.

"It is curious that you should be going to Wales," he says presently, after a pause, in which they have both looked dreamily at the river.

"Curious that I am going to my father's house!" she exclaims wonderingly.

"Ah, to be sure; I forgot that. I meant that it was curious you should be going to Wales just now. My doctor has ordered me to drink the sulphur water at a place with an odd name—let me see—Llandrysak, I think it is called."

"That is within ten miles of Lochwithian, my father's place. How curious!"

"Odd, isn't it?"

"Very; but I believe the doctors are beginning to think a good deal of the Llandrysak springs. Herman was sent there for his health three years ago."

"And it was by that hazard he met you? Happy man to find a treasure even greater than health! If every sick Numa could discover such an Egeria at the spring he is sent to, water cure would be your only remedy."

"I am sorry to hear you are ill enough to be sent to Llandrysak," says Editha.

"Ill!" he repeats rather vacantly. "O, it is not absolute ill-

ness! Want of tone, the doctors call it; or in other words, a fatal tendency towards old age. However, I expect the Welsh waters to make me young again. May I do myself the pleasure of calling on Mr. Morcombe, since I am to be so near? I have already made his acquaintance, you know, here at a very agreeable dinner-party."

"Ah, I remember you met papa here. I have no doubt he'll be pleased to see you again," says Editha, with galling indifference; and then remembering Mr. Lyndhurst's one sublime power, she adds, with more interest, "I should like to introduce you to my sister, and for her to hear you play, if possible. She is an invalid, and rarely has the pleasure of hearing good music."

"Except when you play to her."

"I! O, my powers are very small in that way. I can play just well enough to please and soothe poor Ruth, when there is no better music to be had."

Evening has deepened into night by this time—summer stars peeping out of the shadowy summer sky; the lights of Putney shining through the river mists; one lazy boat moving gently with the stream, the oars resting in the rullocks, the oarsmen singing softly as they drift. Mr. Lyndhurst feels that to prolong his visit would be an impertinence.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Westray; I'll go and smoke my cigar in the Wimbledon lanes. At least I won't say good-bye, but *au revoir*, in the hope of seeing you at Lochwithian." And thus they shake hands and part, and it seems to Hamilton Lyndhurst that he is voluntarily departing out of paradise. Perhaps in the worst men's minds there is some latent capacity for pure feeling, and in the worst men's lives one love which is not all unholy. Or say rather that through the dark veil that shuts these evil natures from the good man's heaven there flashes an occasional ray of light. They are capable of feeling as tender a reverence for virtue as Faust felt beside Gretchen's pillow, and they are capable of sinning as Faust sinned against the woman whose purity can move them to tears.

Hamilton Lyndhurst reviews his career that night as he smokes the pipe of contemplation in the Wimbledon lanes, and he tells himself that his life and his character might have been different had he met such a woman as Editha ten years earlier.

"I am the kind of man who must be happy at any price," he says to himself; "but happiness would have been none the less sweet to me if I had found it in the paths of virtue. Vice in the abstract has no attraction for me. I have admired and pursued worthless women, knowing them worthless; but I never loved such an one. With me vice has been another name for

convenience. Till I saw Westray's wife I never met with a woman worth the sacrifice of matrimony."

Despite his sentimental talk with Editha of quiet evenings and the pleasures of solitude, there is nothing rarer in Mr. Lyndhurst's life than loneliness and self-inspection. He lives like a wealthy profligate in imperial Rome, surrounded with his little circle of parasites, flatterers, and flute-players. If he is weary or out of spirits, his mountebanks and jesters bring forth their treasures of wit and buffoonery for his diversion, his flute-players pipe their sweetest and smile their brightest to beguile him from thought or sadness. Thus he has hardly time to discover that his life is as foolish as it is worthless; that his evil influence upon others whom his wealth corrupts or his selfishness destroys is even less than his evil influence upon himself.

Of late the flute-players, parasites, and flatterers have found their lord and patron less amusable than of old. He has changed his bosom friend once in six months, instead of once in two years. He has given fewer dinners, has not driven his chosen set to Virginia Water once in the season that is just over, and has displayed unmitigated weariness at those banquets at Greenwich and Richmond which have been eaten at his cost. His team of bays and their attendant grooms have had an easy time of it this year; for, except to put in an appearance at Hyde-Park Corner on field days, Mr. Lyndhurst has made little use of his drag. The mail phaeton, with the tall chestnuts, has been altogether idle, Mr. Lyndhurst spending his leisure for the most part in lounging about his Walham-Green garden, where there is a spacious shrubbery-surrounded lawn, enriched with three of those fine old cedars which are still to be found in this southwestern suburb. It is a garden as completely hidden from the outer world as if it were a clearing in the Australian Bush; and here Hamilton Lyndhurst, stretched at ease upon the velvet sward, in smoking-jacket and slippers, reads the newspapers, or dozes over a French novel on sultry summer mornings, till it is time to dress and repair to the clubs or the City, where he disposes of his afternoon either in gossip or business, winding up with a little dinner at club or restaurant, and finishing his evening in haunts known to his species, and to no other section of humanity.

The flute-players and parasites, perceiving this change in their city Sardanapalus, lay their heads together and hold counsel as to the cause. The parasites opine that their patron has been losing money; has been hard hit, has come to grief in one of those commercial steeplechases in which the riders make a short cut to wealth through other people's fortunes. The flute-players

sigh, and suggest that Mr. Lyndhurst may have fallen in love. The chief parasite laughs, or in his own vernacular "screams," at the notion.

"He has been falling in love once in six months or so for the last fifteen years," says this gentleman; "and did you ever know his last infatuation put him out of sorts? He is like Bussy Rabutin, he takes the fever lightly. Depend upon it, the source of his gloom is in the House, and not in the heart."

"Perhaps he is tired of us," speculates one of the flute-players. "He is sometimes barely civil, and he forgot to send me the gloves I won at Goodwood. At least, I'm not quite clear that I won them, but I know I asked him to send them to me—lavender and apricot, four buttons. I wanted them quite awfully."

"A bad sign, that sort of thing, no doubt; but if we bored him he would give us the sack. No man has a more placid way of letting his dear friends know they're out of fashion."

"True," sighs the damsel; "poor Florence Montmorency almost broke her heart at his treatment."

"She did more," replies the parasite; "she put down her brougham."

Thus argue Mr. Lyndhurst's friends, while the subject of their discourse goes his way, unhappy, yet not altogether hopeless. A man who for fifteen years has commanded all prizes that Fortune can give is hardly to be persuaded, save by the experience of absolute failure, that life holds anything quite out of his reach. Hamilton Lyndhurst is the spoiled child of a money-making age; an age in which the power of wealth overrides every other potentiality; an age of gold, in which rank and ancient race have dwindled from their place, or have voluntarily cast themselves down before the chariot of a gilded Juggernaut.

Hamilton Lyndhurst is one of those men for whom good luck seems to be an inheritance. Manhood brought him no estate save his brains, but he has been what his intimates call "in the swim" from the very beginning of his career. He is a man who turns all he touches to gold; or who, touching anything not so convertible, lets it go again so quickly as to escape impoverishment from the contact. He is in and out of a hazardous speculation before the general public have quite made up their minds about it; but to whatever dismal depth of discount the shares in that speculation eventually descend, they are sure to be above par just in that halcyon week when Mr. Lyndhurst sells out. Clergymen's widows and speculative spinsters may bemoan the collapse of that bubble into which their little capitals have melted, but however brief the delusion Mr. Lyndhurst has awakened in

time to retire advantageously. Touch and go has been the ruling principle of all his operations. He is the Proteus of the Stock Exchange, and those who know him best, and regulate their ventures by his genius, may have some idea of his operations to-day, but cannot venture a guess as to his transactions to-morrow. And thus, having ridden on the shoulders of Fortune as on a horse; having been lucky himself, and the source of luck in others; having been flattered, followed, and caressed from youth to middle age, never having encountered the mind which his wealth could not influence, or the rectitude which it could not corrupt, the idea of failure in any enterprise he may undertake, however wicked or however perilous, finds no place in Hamilton Lyndhurst's thoughts. He sees Editha Westray the devoted wife of another man, and, undaunted, unabashed by her purity, tells himself that she is just the one woman who could redeem his existence from vapid profligacy and stale pleasures, and open for him the gates of that unknown world of placid domesticity which, seen from afar, seems to him the wearied profligate's natural haven of rest. He tells himself furthermore that there is no legal process in the land more common than the loosening of marriage bonds, and sets himself to consider by what concatenation of circumstances Editha might be divorced from the husband who so poorly appreciates her peerless worth, and be rendered free to bless the man who knows her value.

Mr. Lyndhurst has seen Herman at Mrs. Brandreth's very often of late, has observed their confidential converse, which may or may not be flirtation, but which assuredly has a sentimental air. Those evenings spent in Myra's drawing-room appear to Mr. Lyndhurst an evidence of Herman's weariness at home. The golden days are over; the husband finds another woman more amusing than his wife, and that other the woman he once loved. Lyndhurst has had the secret of that early attachment from Myra's own lips, in one of those fits of despair in which a woman must have a confidant, however dangerous.

Unhappily, no sin of Herman's—were he to exuberate from foolishness into sin—would loosen the legal tie. He is not likely to assail his wife to the endangerment of life or limb in the presence of witnesses, and only by absolute cruelty can he forfeit the right to be, by law, her husband. On this side Mr. Lyndhurst sees no hope. But the wife, by one rash act, by one fatal unpremeditated step, by folly that should look like sin—nay, with perfect innocence of act and intention, betrayed into some false position by the treachery of others, netted and trapped like a snared bird—might snap the chain which a masculine legislature has contrived to make so brittle for woman, so strong for man.

Dark and cloudy are Hamilton Lyndhurst's ideas at present ; vague and shadowy the visions of his head upon his bed. But Editha's is the one image that occupies his reveries and haunts his dreams, and all his thoughts tend one way.

It is just possible that he might have ceased to think of one whose purity and fidelity would seem to place her in a region beyond the hopes of the most audacious dreamer if his thoughts had been allowed to follow their own bent, uninfluenced by subtle suggestions from another. True that he is a bold, bad man ; a man who has said to himself with Satan, " Evil, be thou my good ; " a man who believes in nothing, hopes for nothing, fears nothing, beyond this imperceptible spot upon the face of nature which we call the world. Yet even the most unscrupulous sinner recoils before the beauty of absolute purity, and Hamilton Lyndhurst might have reconciled himself to the fact that here was one woman utterly beyond reach of temptation, had he not been stimulated to hopefulness by the voice of the tempter.

The tempter speaks in the accents of Myra Brandreth, who takes care to inform Mr. Lyndhurst from time to time of Herman's moral deterioration ; how he has grown weary of domesticity already, and is never so happy as when away from home ; how Mrs. Westray is evidently—a useful word, and of widest significance, that evidently—unappreciated and neglected. A pity ; so young and lovely a creature ; but rather dull, Mrs. Brandreth opines, and hardly a fitting companion for Herman.

" You ought to have married him," says Mr. Lyndhurst.

Myra sighs.

" I think we should have suited each other," she answers, with placid melancholy.

As one confidence deserves another, Mr. Lyndhurst lets her into the secret of his intense admiration for Mrs. Westray. He describes that feeling as a sentiment of exquisite purity, the worship of some bright particular star, rather than admiration of another man's wife. Myra sympathises abundantly, and is all the more sorry for Mr. Lyndhurst's hopeless passion because the lady who inspires it is so unhappy in her union with Herman Westray.

" A literary man should never marry at all," says Mrs. Brandreth conclusively. " He is too self-absorbed, too dependent on the sunshine of the hour, to make a good husband. Or if he must marry, he should at least choose a wife who can help him in his art."

" As you help Westray," suggests Lyndhurst, with his subtle smile. " However dear his wife may be to him as the sharer of

his home, you are the partner of his dramatic successes, and have exercised the greater influence on his career."

Myra sighs again, a deprecating sigh this time, as if she would fain dispute the statement were it not so obviously true. And thus, the subject of conversation between two utterly unscrupulous people, who have never acknowledged any higher law than their own inclinations, Editha may be said to walk blindfold in paths of danger.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"But Faustus' offence can ne'er be pardoned; the serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus."

HOME, a peaceful land smiling in the ripening harvest sunshine. How sweet it is to Editha, returning to her old life, surrounded by the old faces, as in the days that are gone—so utterly gone, so far away even in her memory, that she almost wonders at finding little change in the familiar scenes and faces of her youth! Not a flower in the garden but blooms as when the garden was her peculiar care; but in herself there is a change as of half a century's experience of life and its bitterness. Not for worlds would she confess even to herself, that she has been mistaken in her choice or unhappy in her wedded life; but looking back at the last year, from the stand-point of peace and home, she knows that it has been full of care.

She feels that her arrival without Herman is a disappointment and a cause of wonder for everybody at Lochwithian. Ruth says little, careful not to wound, and seems quite satisfied with Editha's excuses for her husband; but the Squire, outspoken and not richly endowed with tact, talks a good deal about his son-in-law's absence, and in a manner that wounds Editha to the quick.

"I never supposed that a daughter of mine would have had to travel two hundred miles with only a chit of a nursemaid to take care of her. If you had told me that your husband couldn't bring you, I'd have come up to London to fetch you."

"Indeed, dear papa, there was not the least occasion for your doing so. I could travel much farther with nurse and baby without inconvenience."

"It's lucky for you that you're so strong-minded," replies the father grumpily; "for you've married a man who doesn't seem

inclined to give himself much trouble in taking care of you. Things would have been vastly different if you had married Vivian Hetheridge—poor young fellow, not married yet, and broken-hearted about you, every one says.”

“O papa, I saw him last Christmas, and he has grown ever so stout, and looked wonderfully well.”

“A man may gain weight in spite of his broken heart. A fellow who gets a disappointment of that kind often drops his hunting, and eats and drinks more than is good for him—grows careless about gaining flesh, and goes to the bad altogether. If Hetheridge had got over your treatment of him he’d have married before now. A man with such an estate as his is bound to marry. Ah, how nice it would have been to have you within a ten-mile ride of us!”

“Come, papa, I think you have quite enough of me, taking my half-yearly visits into consideration. See how serious you’ve made baby look. He is wondering what you are talking about.”

The Squire, who has had too many grandchildren to consider the relationship a privilege, pokes his finger into the infant’s chubby neck, and chirups inanely.

Wherever Editha goes, whomsoever she sees, she has to answer the same inquiries about her absent husband. Her marriage with the popular young writer has been regarded as a small romance in its way, a love-match pure and simple, and people expect to see husband and wife inseparable, an idyllic pair of lovers unspoiled by matrimony. Thus every one is disappointed, and regards Herman’s non-appearance as a kind of defection. Mr. Petherick shakes his head and frowns gravely.

“Hard at work at a new play, is he? You shouldn’t let him work so hard—wear out his brain, exhaust his constitution; make him old before his time,” he says seriously.

“Indeed, dear Mr. Petherick, I have been most anxious that he should take more rest; but he is in such a hurry to make a fortune for baby.”

“Fortunes are never made in a hurry, my dear. It is the tortoise who gets rich, not the hare.”

“Then I fear Herman will never be rich. There is nothing of the plodder in his nature.”

“So much the worse for both of you,” retorts Mr. Petherick. “Show me the man who can plod, and I’ll show you the man who will succeed. Your lively geniuses, who make a premature success and end in failure, pretend to associate patient industry with dulness; but that idea is only one of those self-sustaining delusions with which idlers console themselves.”

“His worst enemy could not accuse Herman of idleness,”

replies Editha. "I doubt if Mr. Shinebarr, the Queen's Counsel, works harder."

"Does he work with method?" interrogates the Incumbent significantly; and to this question Mrs. Westray is slow to reply, for her husband's literary labour has of late grown more and more fitful and disorderly. He has written for ten hours at a stretch one day, and abandoned his desk altogether on the next, at the call of some one of those various excuses for waste of time which the world misnames pleasure. He has worked from midnight till morning on a Monday, and has spent Tuesday stretched on a sofa reading a French novel, in the last stage of lassitude. He has deserted his study for a week, and then shut himself up there for days and nights in succession, like Balzac, writing as if driven by Furies; the ultimate result of these spasmodic labours being a less amount of work done than in the calm first year of his married life, when he spent his mornings from eleven till two, and his evenings from nine till eleven, in the domestic retirement of his den, Editha working or reading by fireside or window. Latterly he has been only able to write when alone. The watchful eyes of love have disconcerted him.

Even Mrs. Gredby has something to say about the absent husband when Editha goes to see her. Mrs. Westray drives to the New Inn in a basket pony-carriage with nurse and baby, which latter small individual has to be introduced to every hill and valley, copse and rivulet, wood and meadow, familiar to his mother's girlhood.

"And where's the young gentleman from London?" asks Mrs. Gredby when she has done admiring the baby, whom she regards as an infant prodigy, and who curiously enough shows himself most graciously disposed both to Mrs. Gredby and Mrs. Gredby's old gentleman in the chimney-corner—an infant who has met the advances of the county families with contumely. "And why didn't he drive over from the Priory with you this fine morning?"

Editha explains.

"I should have thought that people could write books anywhere," remarks Mrs. Gredby, "purvided they'd a bottle of ink, a penn'orth of steel nibs, and a quire of letter-paper. It do seem hard for you to be down here without your husband. Such a loving couple as you looked, too, that day you brought him to see me. But, to be sure, that was before you was married. I haven't worn my Paisley shawl but once since your wedding-day, Miss Editha, and that was at Llanryddyth Eisteddfod last July. And there sits my old gentleman; no change in him, is there? He's looked ready for his coffin for the last ten years;

but except rheumatics in every joint, there's not much the matter with him."

This cheering statement being repeated in a louder key, the old gentleman nods assent thereto blithely.

"No, there ain't much amiss with me except rheumatics," he says. "Lord forbid I should repine against Providence; but if we must be made with so many jint, it seems a little hard upon us that we ain't purvided with a larger supply of ile to keep 'em going. But we've all got our burdens. My father had a hassmer, and that were a deal worse; his pore old lungs were that weak as he couldn't reach up to the shelf for his pipe without panting as if he were a-goin' to choke; and I'm sure the noises he made of a hevening was ekal in variety to a band o' wind hinstruments. I haven't had much use in my limbs the last two winters, but my lungs is sound, and I can enjoy my bit o' baccy. The missus is hearty enough; though she's a-growing the box for her grave in our back garding."

"How do I know that anybody else would take the trouble to grow it for me?" remarks Mrs. Gredby briskly; "there's nothing like looking arter your own affairs if you want 'em attended to. I shall be under no compliment to neighbours for the box coffin a-top o' my grave; and the thought of that will be a comfort to me as I lie in it," adds the independent-minded mistress of the New Inn.

There is one change which Editha perceives at Lochwithian, and it is one that pierces her heart, for it is a change for the worse in Ruth. The beautiful face is more delicate, more ethereal than when Editha saw it six months ago. The white hand is more transparent in its ivory pallor. The dark eyes are larger and more lustrous. The chrysalis of mortality perishes and shrinks as that butterfly, the immortal spirit, expands its heavenward-soaring wings. To those who read aright, Ruth wears the stamp of a creature in process of translation from the earthly to the spiritual.

Yet never has the invalid been more cheerful, more hopeful about herself. She suffers less than of old, reads much, talks much at times, and with delightful animation. Her joy in Editha's presence is unbounded; her only subject of regret is the weakness which renders her long-promised journey to London impossible just now.

"I should so love to see your house, darling," she says, when the sisters are alone together in the summer dusk, hand clasped in hand, Editha on a low chair by Ruth's pillow. "I begin to wonder if I shall ever see it. Last year Dr. Davies said next year, and now this summer it is next year still. Well, even next

year will come at last, I suppose, and I shall see my pet in her own home, the cleverest of housekeepers."

"I don't know about clever housekeeping," Editha answers ruefully. "We spend a great deal of money, and I can't quite make out how it goes. Of course everything is very dear, as cook says, and Herman is particular about his dinners, and likes game and fish directly it comes in season. We gave three and-sixpence a pound for salmon ever so many times in the spring; and as cook fries whitebait very nicely, I ordered a pint for Herman two or three times a week in the season. But even allowing for small extravagances of that kind, I think our housekeeping costs more than it ought."

Hereupon follows a lengthy and confidential conversation, in which Editha gives Ruth various details of domestic economy, or domestic extravagance. Ruth is shocked at hearing the cost of that small ménage at Fulham, and suggests dishonesty on the part of Mrs. Files. Beer, grocery, butcher's meat, everything costs about double what it ought, as Ruth demonstrates to her sister by a rough-and-ready comparison between the Fulham and Lochwithian bills—therefore Mr. and Mrs. Westray are being cheated.

"It is very dreadful to suspect any one," says Editha, discomposed by this suggestion.

"It is still worse to encourage dishonesty by wilfully shutting one's eyes to it. Let me find you a young woman who can cook—one of your old pupils, perhaps—and take her back with you."

"Do you think we could find one who would cook well enough for Herman?" inquires Editha doubtfully.

"Why not? I should not engage an inexperienced person; but I would make it my business to find a woman of unimpeachable character."

"I had an excellent character with Ann Files," remarks Editha.

"Had you any character of the person who gave the character?"

"Of course not. The lady was quite a stranger to me."

"And she wanted to get rid of a bad servant without what people call 'unpleasantness.' I daresay that's how it was. Let me get you a cook, darling, and if she does not fry whitebait as well as this Ann Files, depend upon it she will reduce your housekeeping expenses by nearly half."

"That would be indeed a comfort. It sometimes makes me quite unhappy to think how hard Herman has to work to pay for things that are thrown on the dust-heap—broken china, half-burned coals, and so on. And yet I am always beg-

ging Files to be economical, and she assures me that it goes to her heart to waste anything; but the things do get wasted somehow."

"The cook I get you will not be wasteful, dear. I am so glad we have had this little talk, and that I can be useful to you in some small way."

Editha is grateful, but is sorely exercised by the thought that Mrs. Files is possibly not so honest as she might be. The idea of having been plundered largely for the last two years; of retrospective wastefulness which might have been avoided had she, Editha, been more careful; the idea of Herman's genius having been compelled to do task-work in order that Ann Files might squander the fruits thereof,—notions such as these present themselves to the young wife's mind in a very painful manner, and she is thoughtful and unhappy for the rest of the evening.

Ruth and Mrs. Jones, the good old Lochwithian housekeeper, hold a consultation next morning, at which Editha is present. Mrs. Jones knows the history of all the young women within ten miles of the Priory, and can lay her hands on a culinary treasure forthwith. Betsy Evans—not the daughter of Evans the grocer, nor Evans the butcher, nor Evans at the Hill Farm, nor Evans who keeps the Prince Albert Inn—but of another Evans who cobbles. Betsy has been a pupil of Editha's at Lochwithian school, and has since graduated as kitchen-maid under Mrs. Davis at Llanmoel Manor-house.

"Are not kitchen-maids in large houses apt to learn wasteful ways?" inquires Editha, with a vivid recollection of Jane Tubbs, who had budded as a kitchen-maid in Belgrave-square to blossom as a cook at Fulham, and who was in the habit of bringing forward "the square" as a precedent for every extravagance, such as the expenditure of a pound of lard for the frying of a single sole, or the investment of two pounds of gravy-beef in a small boat of gravy, which would have been flavourless if it had not been one-third Worcester sauce.

"Wasteful!" exclaims Mrs. Jones, horrified. "Wastefulness was never learned at Llanmoel Manor. Mrs. Davis is a woman who couldn't rest quiet in her bed at night if she thought she had wasted so much as the bread-crumbs off the table-cloth. Her poultry is the finest in Radnorshire, and her hens lay all the winter through."

It is agreed that Betsy Evans shall be engaged to accompany Mrs. Westray to London, upon whose return to Fulham Mrs. Files is to be dismissed with a month's wages. Mrs. Files will of course be angry and remonstrant at this uncourteous treatment; but if she has been as dishonest as Ruth believes, she is

not entitled to much courtesy. Editha is delighted at the idea of keeping house with less money, and sparing her dear Herman in some manner.

"It has gone to my heart to ask him for money so often, knowing how hard he has to work for it," she says sadly; for she feels that the last year of her wedded life might have been happier but for that strain upon her husband's invention, which has made him at once absent-minded, irritable, and moody by the domestic hearth, and eager for the relief of lively society abroad.

Baby, otherwise George Edward, by which names he has been christened, after his two grandfathers, flourishes marvellously in the clear Welsh air, fresh, life-giving, as it blows over the hill-side sheep-walks, the ferny dells and pine-groves. To see the chubby yearling grow rosy and strong, or to hear his happy voice—shrill and loud—as he crawls or rolls upon the short sweet turf, is a joy for Editha, and to be with Ruth a still deeper delight. Yet this first separation from Herman is a sharper trial than the young wife could have foreseen. Her life is snapped asunder, and the larger half of heart and mind are with her husband. Her health improves in her native air, in the divine repose of a country life; but, even seated by Ruth's couch, her thoughts are with Herman in his study. She sees him careworn and anxious, fretful and excited, writing for bread.

"How I wish he loved the country as I do, Ruth!" she exclaims one day, breaking off from the previous subject of conversation to talk of her husband. "He" always means Herman in Editha's discourse. "We should be rich then, with my poor little income and the earnings of one novel a year. No need for him to write plays, or worry himself about dramatic critics. I was thinking to-day, as I looked at that pretty house just under the brow of the hill on the Llandrysak road, what a happy home it might be for Herman and me—such a dear old house and garden, all going to rack and ruin for want of a tenant. How cheaply we might live there—no carriage, no dinner-parties, no expensive amusements, but just the simplest, easiest life, such as one can fancy Wordsworth and Southey leading in the Lake country!"

"It would be very nice, darling, if it were possible," replies Ruth; "it would make my life more happy than words can tell to have you always near me. And surely Herman would write better face to face with nature."

Editha shakes her head despondently.

"I have told him so sometimes," she says; "but he asks me if Samuel Johnson wrote face to face with nature, or Charles

Lamb, or Thackeray, or Dickens. I reminded him once that all our greatest poets have lived remote from cities, at which he laughed and said, 'There's a trifling exception to your rule in the person of one William Shakespeare, whose works were for the most part produced in the neighbourhood of Blackfriars, as the dramatic exigences of the Globe Theatre demanded. Ben Jonson, Marlow, Dryden, and a few others were also denizens of the streets.' And then he tells me that he is not a poet, but a painter of manners and a recorder of events, and that he must live where men abound and events follow one another quickly."

"I should have thought that for a man who had seen the world and mingled largely with his fellow-men the repose of a country life would be most of all conducive to thought and invention," replies Ruth. "Memory, undisturbed by the distractions of to-day, would reproduce the images and impressions of the past; all that a man had seen, suffered, and felt would appear before him distinctly, as in a picture which he need only copy. I can hardly imagine any man writing a great book amidst the distractions of London society."

Herman's letters are frequent, but brief and hurried. He writes in a cheerful spirit, however, and begs his wife to be happy, and to obtain all the good she can for herself and baby from the healthful repose of home. "You were looking worn and harassed when you left me, dearest," he writes, with all his old tenderness. "I shall expect to see you return with the roses I admired so much in the young lady who gave the chief prize at the Eisteddfod."

Editha has been at home nearly a fortnight, and has quite forgotten Mr. Lyndhurst's intention of trying the healing waters of Llandrysak, nothing having yet occurred to remind her of that gentleman's existence. It is a sultry August afternoon—a day on which the world seems to have fallen asleep in the sunshine, and even that sleepy hollow, Lochwithian, is a shade more slumberous than usual. The waters of the Pennant have dwindled to a thread of silver, and trickle gently over those crags adown which they are wont to tumble furiously with the brawl of a small cataract. It is Saturday afternoon, too, and everybody's work seems to be done except Editha's. She and an undergardener go down to the church together, laden with stephanotis and ferns for the decoration of altar and chancel, reading-desk and font; not that to-morrow is any especial Sunday in the ecclesiastical calendar, but rather because the flowers are in their August prime, and Editha deems their fittest use is in the adornment of her beloved church.

She takes the basket of flowers from the gardener in the porch, dismisses him, and goes in alone. The door of this house of prayer is left open for the most part, Mr. Petherick having a notion that a tired labourer returning from his daily toil may like now and then to enter that shadowy temple and kneel for a little while before the sculptured altar, whose Christian emblems no bishop has yet condemned.

Editha pauses on the threshold, surprised, delighted by the sound of the organ, touched as she had never heard it touched before. Some one, a stranger, is playing Mendelssohn's "I waited for the Lord," and the instrument she knows so well is breathing forth tones of sweetness and power that moves her almost to tears.

Who can the player be beneath whose skilful hands the organ speaks a new language? Some tourist, no doubt. An occasional tourist, archæologically-minded, finds his way to Lochwithian in the course of a summer, to grope and pry among the foundations of the Priory, and come to arbitrary conclusions about the history thereof.

Mrs. Westray moves softly about her work, listening to the player. He glides from Mendelssohn into the "Agnus Dei" in Mozart's First Mass in C. The organ, a small one, is on one side of the chancel, screened by purple-silk curtains. Editha is very near the player as she builds a bank of flowers upon the reading-desk, pleased to think of Mr. Petherick's delight to-morrow when he sees her work.

The last notes of the "Agnus Dei" fade into silence, the invisible stranger strikes a chord, and a deep full voice begins to sing a Latin version of Editha's favourite hymn, "Rock of Ages." The voice is Hamilton Lyndhurst's, and she wonders at herself for not having recognised the touch of the musician. No doubt it is because she has never heard him play the organ before.

She goes on with her work noiselessly while he sings. She is wreathing one of the candelabra with stephanotis and long sprays of maiden-hair as Mr. Lyndhurst appears from behind the curtains, and his coming discomposes her no more than if he were the purblind little organist she has known from her childhood. He has quite enough penetration to see this, and is not flattered by the fact. It is new to him to meet a woman to whom his presence is a matter of indifference, and this woman is one upon whom he has bestowed more earnest thought than he has given to the rest of her sex in the aggregate.

He has heard her enter the church, watched her through a chink in the curtains, and has played and sung for her edification.

"How do you like our organ, Mr. Lyndhurst?" she asks as they shake hands.

"Not at all bad for such a small one. I came to Lochwithian with the idea of calling at the Priory, but seeing the church door open strayed in to look at it, and could not resist trying the organ. Fortunate for me, as I can now enter the Priory under your wing."

"Papa will be very pleased to see you. Have you been long in Wales?"

"I came only yesterday."

"Indeed! Then you have seen Herman, perhaps, this week?" she says eagerly, delightedly, as if to have seen Herman was to belong to a privileged order of beings.

"How the simpleton loves him!" thinks Lyndhurst, upon whom this single-hearted, all-absorbing affection has no more influence than the plaintive bleating of the foredoomed calf upon its executioner the butcher. He has made up his mind that this one woman can make him happy—can bend the straggling line of his life into a perfect circle, can harmonise an existence which is now chaotic; and with what dishonour he may stain his manhood, what anguish he may inflict upon others ere he reach his aim, is a calculation that has no place in his thoughts.

"Did you see him?" She repeats her question eagerly, wondering at that troubled look which clouds Mr. Lyndhurst's face for a moment.

"Yes; he dined at Mrs. Brandreth's last Sunday. A delightful little dinner. Just seven people, and, with the exception of your humble servant, all distinguished; the kind of society Westray enjoys so thoroughly."

"Yes," sighs Editha, "he is very fond of clever people. Did you think him looking ill—overworked?"

"On the contrary, he was in high spirits, and looked, as I thought, better than usual—younger, brighter, more like the young fellow I remember seven years ago, fresh from Balliol, and full of enthusiasm and belief in the perfectability of human nature. I daresay if I had seen him next morning in his study I should have found a difference. It is the reaction that tells. We did not leave Mrs. Brandreth's till the small hours. Rather too bad for a quiet little dinner, wasn't it? So many people dropped in during the evening, and every one had so much to say."

"I wonder Mrs. Brandreth can support the fatigue of those Sunday evenings, after acting six nights a week."

"Do you? That shows how little you know her. She is a creature who lives upon excitement, as a Malay upon opium. Give her leisure for thought, and she would die in a year."

"Are her thoughts so bitter that she could not bear them?"

They have come out into the little garden-like churchyard, and linger, Mr. Lyndhurst looking rather absently at the tombstones as he talks.

"I think she has had her disappointments—perhaps I ought rather to say disappointment; for you know in my creed intense feeling comes but once in a life."

"She was left a widow so early," says Editha compassionately.

"Ye-es," drawls Lyndhurst; "but I doubt if the loss of Captain Brandreth sits very heavily on her spirit."

"Was he not a good man?"

"Good? Not in the church-going sense, I fear; but he was thoroughly harmless. A well-meaning young man, who carried a bull-terrier in his coat-pocket and gave his mind to billiards. Nobody's enemy but his own, and very much his own. He was of a good family, and had expectations. Myra Clitheroe married the expectations, which were nipped untimely by his death. I daresay that notion worries her a little."

Editha looks grave. She and Myra have never fraternised, and she likes her less after this hasty sketch of Mr. Lyndhurst's.

"I am glad you thought him looking well," she remarks, recurring to Herman.

"Poets always look well by lamplight. Have you seen his verses in the new weekly journal, the *Connoisseur*?"

"Verses? No, indeed. He so seldom writes poetry, though he is by nature a poet. Is there a poem of his in the *Connoisseur*? And he has not sent it to me! How cruel!"

"Perhaps he thinks it a little out of your line. The *Connoisseur* people wanted him to do something for their first number, so he dashed off half-a-dozen verses; and the little *tour de force* has made quite a hit. Every one was talking of it at Brandreth's the other night."

"And I have not seen it!" says Editha, chagrined.

"Old story of the shoemaker's wife, you know. I can bring you the paper to-morrow, or send my groom over with it to-night, if you'd really like to see it."

"I shall be so much obliged. What is the name of the poem?"

"*Ananke*.' The word Claude Frolo cut upon the wall of his cell, you know, which in plain English means Fate. The title in Greek characters looks rather *chic*, I assure you. De Musset never did anything better than the poem. The *Connoisseur* is going in for that kind of thing—abuses everybody, hits out from the shoulder right and left, and promises to be a success. I hear there are two injunctions and three actions for

libel against the proprietors already; but as the shareholders include two of our wealthiest noblemen and a great City swell that kind of thing won't balk them. I have pledged myself to support the paper to the extent of a few thousands."

Editha's interest in the *Connoisseur* is bounded by that one column which contains her husband's verses. Mr. Lyndhurst perceives this, and does not pursue the subject. They pass from the churchyard to the shrubbery, and take the winding path to the house. It is nearly time for afternoon tea in Ruth's room, and Editha means to offer Mr. Lyndhurst that innocent refection. They ascend the shrubberied slope side by side in friendly converse. It is like Red Ridinghood showing the wolf the way to her grandam's cottage.

"What do you think of Westray's continental expedition?" Lyndhurst inquires presently.

"Continental expedition! I don't know what you mean," falters Editha, with an alarmed look.

"Perhaps I oughtn't to have mentioned it. After all, it may be only an idea. But I thought he would have told you all about it."

"About what?"

"The proprietors of his old paper, the *Day Star*, want him to go as special war-correspondent for this Franco-Prussian scrimmage. The man who has been doing the work has knocked under, and come home invalided. They offer Westray splendid terms, and he seems to think the thing would suit him—the variety and excitement freshen his brains, and so on. I daresay he feels himself a little used up after the pace he has been going—in literature, I mean—for the last two years."

This remark comes like a stab. The last two years are his married life. It is for her sake, for the maintenance of that expensive, ill-managed home, he has squandered the wealth of his brain, wasted his genius on recklessly rapid composition. The delicate flowers of his fancy have been forced to premature growth, and their price has gone to fill Ann Files's grease-pot.

This bitter thought gives way before the appalling ideas conjured up by that word "war-correspondent." A man who writes history at the cannon's mouth, amidst a hailstorm of shrapnell and grape, with murderous shells tearing up the earth round about him, with new-made chasms yawning before his feet, and the smoke-darkened air rent with the groans of the dying.

"He would never think—he could not be so cruel!" she gasps. "He would not hazard the life that is so dear—"

"Hazard, my dear Mrs. Westray! He would be in no more danger among the belligerents than in the retirement of his own

study. You never heard of a special correspondent coming to grief. They talk very big, and to read their letters one would suppose they rode shoulder to shoulder with the commanding officer; but it's my belief they sit quietly by a wood fire in some roadside inn near the scene of operations, and get their information hot and hot from small boys. Your small boy would go up to the cannon's mouth and look into it for sixpence. I shall be angry with myself if I have given you the slightest alarm. After all, Westray may have no idea of accepting the *Day Star* people's offer. All I know is, that the offer was made, and talked about at Mrs. Brandreth's. But no doubt he has refused it, or he would have told you."

"Yes," Editha says, slowly recovering composure; "he would have told me. He never kept a secret from me in his life."

"Ah, that's what all wives say," thinks Lyndhurst; "but I fancy I could tell you something about him that would astonish you for all that."

He has given her an uncomfortable, unsettled feeling about her absent husband, and that for the moment is enough; so he changes the subject, talks of the scenery, admires Priory and garden. Editha has forgotten her idea of offering him tea till he reminds her of her promise to introduce him to her sister.

"Miss Morcombe is fond of music, you told me?" he says.

"Passionately; and she hears so little good music. I shall be very pleased if you will play to her. There is a harmonium in her room—the best papa could get for her. Herr Louis Engel chose it. Will you come to Ruth's room, and have some tea?"

"I shall be charmed."

They go in together, and Ruth looks up from Jeremy Taylor's *Rule of Conscience*—she is a lover of the old divine, whose quaintness and classic lore have a curious charm for her—astonished at the appearance of a stranger.

"Mr. Lyndhurst, my sister. You have heard me talk of Mr. Lyndhurst, Ruth, one of Herman's old friends."

The tea-table is ready. Editha takes off her hat, and seats herself before the old-fashioned silver urn, just as in the old days when Herman first came to the Priory. Something of the glow and freshness of untroubled youth has faded from her face since that happy time, but the face has gained in dignity and beauty. To Lyndhurst it looks like the face of a queen.

"My queen, at any rate," he says to himself; "my lady, whom to love is honour."

He takes his place at her side presently—Herman's old place—and performs the small services of the tea-table, addressing his conversation chiefly to Ruth, whom he is desirous to con-

ciliate. They would seem to have not an idea in common, this invalid recluse and the sin-dyed man of the world. Yet they get on wonderfully well. Ruth's book, in its old-fashioned tree-calf binding, has slipped from the silken coverlet at her knee to the carpet. Lyndhurst picks it up, glances at the title as he returns it, and begins to talk about the learned Jeremy, whose pages he knows as well as those of Balzac or Dumas fils, Feydeau or Flaubert, Heine, or Spielhagen. A great reader Mr. Lyndhurst, in those midday hours which he gives to the repose of his body, and in the small hours sometimes, when he has made the idle experiment of going to bed soon after midnight. He has a shelf of his favourite books and a reading-lamp at the head of his bed, and takes down a volume of Heine or De Musset and reads himself into dreamland, when a man less careful of his own well-being would take a dose of chloral.

Mr. Lyndhurst sips his orange pekoe with an air of quiet enjoyment that bespeaks a placid soul refreshed by this pure and gentle society. It is strange how much he relishes the novelty of the situation. Mephistopheles drinking tea with Margaret and her mother could not be more out of place, could not carry the situation with a more consummate tact. After tea he goes to the harmonium at Editha's request, and plays Beethoven's Symphony in C minor, and then the "Eroica," and after that the "Pastorale." His listeners cannot have too much of that magnificent music. The harmonium peals out full organ notes, ripe and round, and fills the room with melody—melody which overflows into the corridor, where the Squire hears it on his way to that study or den where he reads the *Field* and the *Observer*, writes his letters, takes his afternoon nap, and occasionally goes into the mystery of accounts with his bailiff.

He looks in at the door, asking, "Who have you got there, Ruth?" and thereupon renews his acquaintance with Hamilton Lyndhurst.

"I thought there was too much noise for our little organist," says Mr. Morcombe blandly. "And so you have come down to try our sulphur or saline. Wonderful good they do you Londoners, I believe. Which are you taking—saline or sulphur?"

This is one of the conventional inquiries at Llandrysak. Mr. Lyndhurst looks embarrassed.

"My medical man advised sulphur," he replies, with a lurking sparkle in those dark eyes of his, "perhaps on the doctrine of signatures."

"You must stop and dine with us of course. How did you come over?"

"I rode."

"And you've put up your horse at the village inn? Why didn't you bring him here? He'd have been better taken care of."

"No doubt. The village stable is certainly rather primitive, but I saw the corn put into his manger, and left him happy. I shall be too delighted to stop if I am not in the way."

"In the way! We live so far out of the way that a visit from an intelligent stranger is the greatest luxury we can enjoy. How about this Ministry now? Will Gladstone bring in his bill next session, or retire upon his defeat, eh?" And the Squire begins to talk politics lustily, and speedily carries off his guest to see the gardens and the home-farm, but not before Lyndhurst has promised to return to Ruth's room after dinner, and play Mozart or Mendelssohn. He contrives to make himself agreeable to the Squire during that inspection of the premises: surveys the stables, which are Mr. Morcombe's especial pride, inspects all the horses, and pronounces on their various merits with an acumen which establishes him in their owner's good graces. No man can make a stronger or better impression in a given time than Hamilton Lyndhurst.

Mr. Petherick dines with them, and after dinner they all go up to Ruth's room to take their coffee and hear Mr. Lyndhurst play. It is quite a pleasant evening: the softly-lighted room; the two women, one a pale and fragile copy of the other's beauty, or say, rather, one a drawing in crayons, the other a painting in oils; the quaint old furniture and china harmoniously arranged, nothing crowded or ill assorted—make altogether a charming picture. It is ages since Hamilton Lyndhurst has felt himself the inmate of a home; and this is home; curiously different from the houses he visits in London, which have the air of being public places of entertainment, minus the moneytaker at the doors, and sometimes minus the amusement.

He leaves regretfully at the stroke of ten, and rides away in the clear summer moonlight, feeling as if he had been in Paradise. Unhappily the rose-hued light of an earthly Eden is too mild a fire to purify a sin-steeped soul like his, and he rides back to Llandrysak calmly meditative of evil, the solemn hills looking down at him, distant worlds shining upon him, the mystery of the universe around and about him, and affecting him no more deeply than it does the field-mouse, whose sharp beady eyes look warily out of its hole under the hedge yonder.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"No settled senses of the world can match
The pleasure of that madness."

MR. LYNTHURST'S groom rides over to Lochwithian before breakfast next morning, and Editha finds the first number of the *Connoisseur* beside her plate on the breakfast-table, packed in an official-looking vellum envelope, and sealed with Lyndhurst's monogram. He pretends to no ancient lineage, confesses frankly that his grandfather sold oranges in Houndsditch, and is above the petty pride of a purchased coat-of-arms.

Editha opens the packet with eager hands. The *Connoisseur* is a journal of gentlemanly aspect, printed on thick creamy-hued paper, in fair readable type, largely spaced, and with wide columns. *Chic* is the predominant characteristic of the new periodical. It abuses roundly, is outspoken, insolent even, but not snobbish or petty. It has a good-natured arrogance, a soldierly freedom of speech, and that delightful modern scepticism which may fairly be called unbelief in everything.

Editha turns with a glowing cheek to the poem 'ANAFKIL, which occupies a place of honour in the middle of the paper; but that blush of wifely pride pales as she reads, and before she has finished the poem, she rises from the table to hide the tears of wounded feeling.

The verses are the complaint of a soul ill at ease; weariness, disappointment, unbelief, are expressed in every line. No happy husband, no Christian gentleman, could have thought these thoughts or written these words, Mrs. Westray tells herself. They are verses eminently calculated to take the town; for they breathe just that spirit of disappointment in the past and indifference about the future which is the dominant note of town life.

Editha looks at the signature through blinding tears. Yes, it is his name; he boldly signs this confession of no-faith. She has been his wife two years, and yet knows him so little that these verses come upon her like a revelation. Her love, her devotion, her unwearied thoughts of him and care for him, have been unsufficing for his happiness. He writes of himself as a disappointed man; a man for whom life and love have alike been failures. He writes of Fate and man's future like an infidel.

Could she but know exactly the truth about this unlucky little

poem, which has cost her bitter tears, and brought her husband a handsome cheque, she would know that the verses were dashed off after a disagreeable interview with Mr. Standish the publisher, in which that gentleman complained of the result of Herman's last novel, and offered two hundred and fifty less for his next; she would know that Herman's spirit had been furthermore disturbed by a slashing criticism of his last play in the *Censor*, where he found himself stigmatised as the latest perverter of dramatic taste and poisoner of public morals, to say nothing of being condemned as an ignoramus, unacquainted with his own language, and unprovided with a dictionary.

Thus lashed to fury, his Muse had raised her crest somewhere in the small hours, shaken her tresses savagely, like another Medusa, and hit out against Fate; Fate meaning at this moment a decline of two hundred and fifty pounds in the market price of a three-volume novel and the small carplings of an anonymous critic.

Unhappily Editha takes the matter in sober seriousness, weighs every word, ponders every latent meaning, and is miserable. She locks up the paper as if it were a guilty secret. Not for worlds would she have those dreadful verses read by Ruth. She writes to her husband in the hour between breakfast and church time; a long piteous letter, telling him how shocked and grieved she has been by sentiments which seem to her like a new language from his pen, asking him about the *Day Star's* offer, and if he had ever been so cruel as to think for one moment of going to the scene of war; and finally imploring him to come down to Lochwithian, if it were only for a few days' rest for himself, or for that much lesser reason—only to make her happy.

"You thought very little of coming backwards and forwards when we were engaged," she adds, with gentle reproachfulness. "Have I less claim upon you now I am your wife, and when our child is just old enough to ask in his baby-language why you are not here?"

She is not a little surprised to see Mr. Lyndhurst stroll into the garden an hour after luncheon on this summer Sunday. She is carrying her boy round to look at the roses, which he examines critically with big round blue eyes, and sniffs daintily with a small "tip-tilted" nose. She had not heard the Squire's hospitable invitation to his new acquaintance last night, and had no idea that Mr. Lyndhurst was to eat his Sabbath dinner at the Priory.

"I hope you won't think me a tremendous nuisance, Mrs. Westray," he says apologetically. "Your father was good enough to ask me to drive over this afternoon, and I could not refuse

such a tempting offer. Llandrysak on Sunday is the abomination of desolation. The bell of the little Anglican church sounds like the stroke of a toasting-fork upon a frying-pan; the Independent chapel tinkles and jangles all the morning. The Independents begin to howl hymns at ten; the Anglicans intone at half-past. You can hear both melodious sounds far away across the common in the silence of the place. When Slingsby Edwards has finished his sermon, his flock troops off to the Anglicans to make a finish. Shows a mind unfettered by sectarianism, doesn't it?"

Editha's grave looks reprove this jesting with sacred things; so Mr. Lyndhurst turns his attention to the baby. Praise a woman's child, or horse, or dog, and you find the surest short cut to her favour. The child inclines to Hamilton at once, as four-footed animals incline to him, perhaps because he is big, powerful, and *débonnaire*, and has a surface benignity which attracts unreasoning creatures.

The Squire appears presently, returning from his farm, in a straw hat, and with a Sunday-afternoon listlessness of gait and manner; and they all wander about the gardens, and down through the orchard to the ruins, Mr. Lyndhurst carrying the baby on his shoulder, and feeling himself quite a domestic character. They dawdle about, looking at the rugged old stone walls, threaded with pale spleenwort and gray mosses, and speculating upon the plan of nave and aisles, transept and apse, sacristy and lady chapel. They stroll down to the river—that placid trout stream which was wont to flow through the Priory kitchen. There bloom the forget-me-nots, which Herman and Editha plucked together three years ago in the untroubled morning of their love. How well she remembers that day and the new dreams it brought her, the faint vague hopes which she tried to shut out of her mind, fearing a new influence which might come between her and Ruth! Now, Ruth is only second in her life, tenderly beloved still, but never again the first.

"I might have been happier if I had been true to Ruth," she thinks sadly, as her father and Mr. Lyndhurst stroll on a little in advance of her, talking politics, the baby deliciously content with his lofty perch, looking down at his mother as she slowly follows, full of thought.

If she had been true to Ruth, if she had made up her mind at once and for ever to remain unmarried for love of Ruth, how much care, how many a pain she might have missed! It would have been a hard thing to refuse that ardent lover, a hard thing to reject the sweet responsibility of wifedom; but once the sacrifice made, how easy all the rest of life! How simple, how single her duty as

Ruth's nurse and consoler! how complicated, how difficult as Herman's wife! He has committed to her the custody of his days, the guardianship of his fame; and how little she has done for either! She has trebled the cost of his existence, and has not succeeded in making his home happy, since he goes elsewhere in search of amusement. Upon his art she has exercised no influence whatever, since the last page he has published proves that in thought and opinion they two, husband and wife, are wide as the poles asunder. Her reverence for things that are holy, her deep and fervent faith, have had no more effect upon his way of looking at life than if he had spent the last two years of his existence among South-Sea Islanders.

They dine at six, and when the Squire and his guest return to the drawing-room after dinner, Editha has gone to church; whereby Mr. Lyndhurst finds the next two hours hang somewhat heavily on hand. Mr. Morcombe has shown him the stables and the home-farm. He has seen the ruins—the garden. There is really nothing more for him to see at Lochwithian, except the inexhaustible hills. The Squire's conversation waxes monotonous. They go out into the garden, and smoke their cigars amidst the odours of roses and honeysuckle. Lyndhurst looks at the church-window, whence shines the faint gleam of the pulpit-candles, and wonders how much longer the service is to last. Anon comes the sound of the organ, village voices singing an evening hymn, and then the little congregation comes slowly out of the gray gothic porch, and presently Mr. Lyndhurst hears the click of the garden-gate, which announces Editha's return. She must pass them on her way to the house.

"Good-night, papa," she says. "I am going to Ruth's room, and I don't think I shall come downstairs again unless you want me. Good-night, Mr. Lyndhurst."

"Out of sorts, pet?" asks the Squire, scrutinising her after his good-night kiss. "You are looking pale. No bad news from Westray, is there?"

"No, papa; I've a headache, that's all."

"Thunder in the air, no doubt. Good-night, dear; go and rest."

And so, after a friendly good-night to Mr. Lyndhurst, Editha leaves them, and the Squire and his guest go down to the gate to waylay Parson Petherick, who comes in to smoke a cigar with them after his day's long labour.

That unhappy look of Editha's haunts Hamilton Lyndhurst as he drives back to Llandrysak.

"She has begun to doubt him," he thinks. "That sceptical poem has made her miserable. If she is so wretched because he

has shown himself something less holy than the saint she has made him, what will she suffer when she knows more? When she knows that the moth has flown back to the flame that lured him years ago, and that his wings are singed by the old fire?"

CHAPTER XXV.

"For men at most differ as Heaven and earth,
But women, worst and best, as Heaven and Hell."

TUESDAY morning brings Herman's answer to his wife's letter. It is brief, but in some measure reassuring. He makes light of her anxieties; he ridicules her fears.

"First, as for the *Day Star*, dearest," he writes, after a few affectionate commonplaces, "such an offer as you speak of has been made, and is, I freely confess, a tempting offer. So complete a change of scene, the life and movement of the thing, would, I believe, refresh and stimulate me. I have been growing dismally stagnant of late, and find, as you have yourself observed, the ink flow less freely from my pen than of old. But, inviting as the opportunity is, I feel that, as a family man, I am bound to forego it, and you never would have heard a syllable about it from me. It was rather officious of Lyndhurst to mention the affair; but these idle men are such inveterate gossips. Be content, dear; I sit in my den at Fulham like a spider in his hole, and spin copy, with an occasional feeling that I am spinning it, like the spider, out of my own internal economy."

"I am sorry you disapprove of the verses. They were struck off in the heat of the moment, and mean very little except that I was tired and depressed when I wrote them. Be happy, dearest; enjoy the simple pleasures of Lochwithian, and come back to me by and by blooming and beautiful as when first I saw your face shining upon me under Dewrance's umbrella at the Eisteddfod."

"The horses are well; the house has a dusty look in your absence, and there is more noise of a hilarious kind in the kitchen of an evening than I quite like. Kiss our pet with a hundred superfluous kisses for me.—Your ever-loving husband,

"HERMAN."

She is comforted by this letter, vague as its assurances are.

Poor fellow, he owns to a passing weariness of his art. If he would but give himself rest—surrender his expensive house and servants, sell carriages and horses, and come down here, where they might live so cheaply! Editha explores an empty house in her walk that morning, and longs to furnish it for herself and Herman. It is a rustic dwelling, on the slope of one of the great green hills that look down upon the old Priory—a roomy, comfortable cottage, built by Mr. Petherick's predecessor, and lately occupied by a retired naval man, who made garden and orchard the pride of his life. This old post-captain has been dead some months, and his cherished garden has been neglected while the house has been waiting for a new tenant. It lies a little off the high-road, and is at present eight miles from a railway station; but the view from its windows is one of the finest in this part of the country, and the air is purest ether. A year hence there will be a loop line to Lochwithian, and this aerie amidst the hills will be so much more accessible.

Editha wanders in and out of the empty rooms, while the baby and his nurse sit on the lawn plucking daisies among the long grass. She finds a lovely room at the side of the house, with a French window and balcony overhanging the valley, a waterfall babbling below, and rough crag and pinewood towering above. Such a study for a poet! Here, surely, inspiration would come as it never could in flat sluggish Fulham. Above there are two airy rooms, which would make the most delightful nurseries for baby. There are just rooms enough for comfort, none to spare for show—a snug little dining-room, suggestive of a *partie carrée* at most; a rustic drawing-room, with a big bow-window.

"How happily we might live here," muses Editha, "wasting no money upon dinner-giving or display! We could manage with one servant even, and I could help to keep the house nice. What pleasure it would be to me to work for Herman—to be really useful to him, instead of being only an occasion of expense as I am now! And how delightful to live close to Ruth and papa! We could go to London sometimes, of course—for Herman to superintend the production of his plays, for instance—but I cannot think that it is necessary for an imaginative writer to live in London."

The days slip smoothly, gently by at Lochwithian—not altogether happy, for the wife's heart is full of cares for her absent husband, but brightened by many household joys. To be with Ruth, to see her child happy, to meet old friends again, and go back to the sweetness of youth—all this should be enough for happiness, Editha thinks; but her heart yearns for the day when she can reasonably go back to Fulham.

Herman's letters all entreat her to stay—to make the most of home joys, her beloved hills, her old pensioners, and not to hurry back to the murky suburb, which has a dusty shabby look now the freshness of summer has worn off; Herman tells her.

Hamilton Lyndhurst comes over to Lochwithian two or three times a week, and joins the Squire and his daughter in their rides and drives, contriving to render himself agreeable to both. He cultivates his acquaintance with Ruth, and brightens many an hour for the invalid with his music. In this fortnight of his life he enjoys more domestic happiness than he has known in all his previous existence. The freshness of the sensation makes it strangely sweet to him. This equable life, flowing gently on, without pleasures, without excitements, is something utterly new to him.

The fortnight hurries by like a dream, as it seems to Mr. Lyndhurst, and yet it is the longest fortnight in his life to look back upon—a complete existence in miniature.

“My mind has taken root here,” he tells Ruth, when he pays his farewell visit. “I feel as if I were a native of these hills, instead of the miserable Cockney I am. I shall fancy myself all adrift again when I return to stony Babylon.”

To stony Babylon he does return, timing his departure cleverly—just two days before Editha's. This looks well, and gives an accidental air to his presence in the neighbourhood of Lochwithian. A less-practised schemer would have lingered to the last, and would have managed to be Editha's escort on the homeward journey. Lyndhurst departs without having awakened anybody's suspicions as to the purity of his intentions—unless, indeed, there lurks some shadow of distrust in the pastor's honest mind.

“I don't quite like that fellow,” says Mr. Petherick, when the Squire has been praising his departed guest. “He is too smooth. Velvet paws always remind me of cats. He made himself so abominably agreeable to us all; and yet he seemed a fish out of water, somehow, in spite of his easy manner and his air of frank enjoyment. He is not the type of man to be so delighted with our countrified pleasures. Nature and he don't harmonise. What kind of person is he in town, Editha?”

Mrs. Westray smiles at the question.

“I think he is very much the same man you have seen here—not quite so frank or genial, perhaps. But Herman's friends are always talking criticism, and a man like Mr. Lyndhurst says ill-natured things for the sake of being witty. He takes life very easily, and seems to have no particular purpose in his existence. People call him Midas, and say that all he touches turns to gold;

but I doubt if he has much enjoyment of his wealth. He always has rather a tired air, as if he had tried all the pleasures of life and found them vanity. I never saw him seem so near happiness as he has seemed to be here."

"Humph!" mutters Mr. Petherick, "that's rather odd, isn't it? Buttercups and daisies would seem scarcely the fare for that kind of man—unless he had some motive for liking the buttercups and daisies. Perhaps it's the novelty that pleases him. I shouldn't wonder if Nebuchadnezzar enjoyed the grass of the field after the barbaric splendour of his palace. However, I must confess your Mr. Lyndhurst is a problem I can't solve. Does your husband like him?"

"Very much. He is one of our most frequent guests."

At last the day comes for Editha's return. She has been at the Priory nearly a month, and her presence has done wonders for Ruth—has improved her so much, that Editha forgets the fears which were aroused by her sister's altered looks on her arrival. The sisters spend their last evening together alone, in confidential talk.

"Darling, I look forward to the delight of coming down here to live some day," Editha says. "I know that Herman is tired of London, though I cannot induce him to believe that he is. All his pleasures are monotonous, and the life he leads in town is wearing him out. I see it too plainly. We are living expensively, and his brain is being exhausted by the effort to keep pace with our expenditure. If I could persuade him to do without the society of a few people who amuse him, the rest would be easy. He is by nature a student, and I know that he could be as happy as the day is long in Captain Fitzgerald's cottage."

"He has your health and happiness to consider as well as his own," replies Ruth; "and I know how much better you and baby would be in this clear air. I don't think the Fulham air suits you, dear. You were looking ill and worried when you came."

"I had been anxious about Herman."

They talk hopefully of the happy life they might lead if Herman would but consent to forsake clubs and parties, and be satisfied with a bucolic or meditative existence, remote from the stir and thrill of crowds. Fair dream of a future which is perchance impossible! It serves to make the sisters happy on this their last evening.

Editha departs at noonday on a blazing Saturday towards the end of August, accompanied by nurse and baby, trunks, baskets, rugs, umbrellas, a basket of ferns for her garden, and a huge hamper of country produce—quite a train of heavy luggage,

which occupies one end of the little platform at Llandrysak, and throws the two Welsh porters into convulsions of excitement and bathes them in perspiration. Betsy Evans, the new cook, is to follow her mistress in a few days, when Mrs. Files has been disposed of.

The Squire and the Parson are both in attendance, and Mrs. Gredby has descended from her fastness to offer tribute, in the shape of a large fan-shaped nosegay, fragrant with southernwood and clove carnations, and banked up with hollyhocks, which floral stack she calls a "bokay."

"I should like you to have something to remember me by when you get home, Miss Editha," she says, "and the little gentleman likewise, so I've made so bold as to bring you a pair of ducks."

"O Mrs. Gredby, the flowers would have been enough," remonstrates Editha, as the landlady of the New Inn withdraws the corner of a white cloth from her basket, and displays two innocent yellow beaks hanging pathetically over the wickerwork.

"No, Miss Editha; flowers is very well, but you put 'em in a jug on your drawing-room table, and you think no more of 'em. They pass clean out of your mind; but if you make your dinner off a fine pair of ducks, you don't forget *them*. Their very richness makes an impression. There's nothing hangs about you like roast ducks. You allude to them afterwards, and say, 'The day we had Mrs. Gredby's ducks.' They're something to look back upon, you see, miss."

"I shall remember your kindness in any case, dear Mrs. Gredby," says Editha, smiling.

"Yes, miss, and you'll remember them ducks, and so will your good gentleman. There hasn't been a finer couple killed this year, not within forty mile. I reared 'em myself, so I ought to know—besides feeding of 'em out of my own mouth when they was weakly."

Mrs. Gredby expatiates on the baby—a chubby, rosy-checked young gentleman, in a white pelisse and small sailor-hat; and anon comes the train of some half-dozen carriages, which is to convey Editha to Shrewsbury. She has books and papers to read, she has a basket of Lochwithian peaches, and, best of all, she has baby; so the journey can hardly be tedious, thinks the Squire, as he kisses her and bids her God-speed.

The journey does seem to her somewhat tedious, in spite of books and baby. Once away from Lochwithian, her ardent desire to be home makes her restless and impatient—inwardly impatient only, for in outward seeming she is all gentleness

and repose. She is not given to shifting her burden of weariness upon other people's shoulders.

It is nearly a week since she has heard from Herman, and that fact is sufficient to fill her with uneasiness. She feels that she has been too long absent from home and duty—feels herself a neglectful wife, although she has been only obeying Herman in prolonging her stay at the Priory. How she longs to be with him—to look in his face, to see if he has still that worn worried look which made her wretched before she left home! How she longs to be sitting opposite him in the dear little study, pouring out that strong green tea which is his nectar, and listening to his literary plans! Between her and this delight there are only so many miles, so many hours; but her impatience grows as the miles and hours lessen.

There is a delay of two hours at Shrewsbury, and it is evening—a breathless evening, with a gray thunderous sky—when the train enters the terminus. Editha has written to announce her coming, and expects to be met at the station by Herman after this her first absence. She scans the faces on the platform eagerly as the train moves past them, but cannot see that one face, with its bright recognising look, as she has been picturing it to herself throughout the journey.

He is there, no doubt, she tells herself, though not in the outer edge of the crowd. She alights hastily, and hardly stops to see that nurse and baby make their descent safely, so eager is she to find Herman.

“Lor, mum, you’ve forgot your travelling-bag,” says the nurse, plunging back into the carriage, where that treasure of feminine necessities has been left in the rack.

Editha cannot think of travellingbags. She is looking for Herman; but among all those hard-faced strangers his dear face appears not. The blankness sends a pang through her heart.

“Hadn’t we better get a cab, mum?” says the nurse.

“Yes, Jane. I thought Mr. Westray would have been here to meet me.”

“And I should have thought so too, mum; such a lot of luggage as we’ve got, and baby getting so sleepy, poor lamb.”

The “poor lamb” is decidedly fractious. The heat, the dust, the long journey have tried his youthful temper. Jane struggles with the double burden of infant and travelling-bag. She has the basket with Mrs. Gredby’s ducks over her arm. “Porter!” she screams, in a shrill, complaining voice, seeing that Mrs. Westray stands helpless, like a suddenly-awakened sleep-walker.

Porters come, and Mrs. Westray’s luggage is selected from a mountain of trunks, portmanteaus, tin baths, japanned bonnet-

boxes and hampers, and then it is stacked upon a rickety-looking cab, and Editha, with one despairing look along the platform, takes her place in the vehicle.

It is a long drive to Fulham—a dreary one after that disappointment. How dull and murky London looks after the dewy freshness, the heavenward-mounting hills of Lochwithian—a hateful place to return to, assuredly, even though it means home! The long dusty road, the endless procession of shabby suburban villas, dust-whitened trees, cabs, straw, rags, and rubbish on the dusty pavements, sordid shops, ragged-looking omnibuses, everything ugly and poverty-stricken.

“Why was he not at the station to meet me?” That is the question which Mrs. Westray asks herself more or less throughout that long jolting journey. At the least it looks unkind. He is dining out, perhaps, at some social club-dinner; or has gone to see a new play produced at one of the theatres—the work of a rival.

“If he had only written to tell me that he would be engaged this evening, I should have been spared the disappointment,” thinks Editha, and then reproaches herself for feeling wounded by this seeming neglect.

“No doubt he has some good reason,” she tells herself. “He was too busy to come perhaps, and I shall find him at home, at work, and expecting me—in his old velvet coat, with books thrown about in every direction, and the tea-tray among his papers. Or if he has been obliged to go out, there will be a note to tell me why, and in an hour or two he will be back. I shall just have time to change my dusty clothes and see baby put to bed before he comes.”

Thus does Editha sprinkle cool patience upon her wounded spirit, and when at last the cab blunders into shabby old Fulham, whose High-street has a look of having been forgotten and left behind by the march of progress, she is prepared to accept things pleasantly, however they may fall out, and to give her husband loving greeting, even though he should have gone out to dine on this particular Saturday, and not gladden her eyes till between eleven and twelve o'clock. She will say like Desdemona, “Men are not gods,” and will be content with something less than “such observancy as fits the bridal.”

They have turned into the little lane that leads to Bridge-end House. Everything has the same dull and dusty look. The gray sky darkens with declining day. Putney-church clock strikes eight with a dismal clang. Nature wears no smile of welcome. The slate-coloured river frowns. The study blind is down. The cabman rings three times before the door is opened.

At last the parlour-maid appears, capless and slatternly. She comes slowly to the gate, opens it, and begins with a languid air

to assist in carrying in the luggage. She brightens a little at sight of the ducks and the hamper.

"Is Mr. Westray at home?" asks Editha, very sure that he is not, since he has not appeared to greet her.

"At home, mum? O no, mum. Didn't you get his letter?"

"What letter?"

"Telling you that he was going away, mum."

"Going away—where? Has he gone away?"

"Yes, mum. He went off to France yesterday afternoon quite sudden. He wrote you a letter, mum, astin' you to stay with your par while he was away, and he told cook and me not to expect you for the next three weeks. But I'm afraid Selina must have posted the letter too late."

"I had no letter," replies Editha, bearing up against this blow with heroic effort. How cruel, how heartless of him to leave her thus! What temptation that fame or gain can hold out should weigh against the anguish she feels at this desertion? He has left her—heedless of her fears—left her to enter scenes of danger, left her perhaps to die. "Lor, mum, how white you do look!" says Mary Ann, the parlour-maid, who is not without compassionate feeling even for that natural enemy, a mistress. "Master said he shouldn't be away much above three weeks, and the change would do him good. He was looking ill and tired, cook and me noticed. But of course, being out so late of evenings would make a difference."

"He was out often," falters Editha, hardly knowing what she says. O, bitter agony of disappointed hope! She feels as if life could never seem fair again.

"Well, yes, 'um. Pretty well every evening. It was dull and lonesome, you see, for him at home. Houses by the river is lonesome, except in the spring, when the laylocks and laburniums is in blow. And the blackbeadles was dreadful in the 'ot weather, that bold you'd meet 'em at every turn. I don't wonder master didn't care for his 'ome."

Happily there is baby to be thought of. His fractiousness increases when he discovers that no preparations have been made for his reception; that the mattresses have to be dragged out of his cot and aired at a hastily-lighted fire, and that his nursery smells unpleasantly of mottled soap.

Cook has gone to pass the evening with her relations. The two young women bustle about, and get tea and a rasher for Mrs. Westray, and light the lamp in the study.

Here Editha takes her lonely meal, when baby had been cared for and made comfortable. The room is just as Herman left it, and speaks to her of him; books piled on the floor, the chairs, the table; papers scattered everywhere. His pipes, his tobacco-

jars on table and mantelshelf. There was a time when he was less disorderly. These careless habits tell of a weary mind.

Hardest of all does it seem to have missed his farewell letter. Posted too late for yesterday's mail, it will only reach Lochwithian to-morrow morning, and cannot return to Fulham until Monday. All the blank desolate Sunday must intervene before Editha can have his letter, and know his reasons for breaking a promise that should have been held sacred. He assured her, when he laughed at her fears, that he had no idea of accepting the *Day Star's* offer, and in the face of that assurance—which to her seemed a promise—he is gone. She sends for an evening paper, and tries to make out how things are going on at the seat of war. "Our special correspondent" writes of deadly strife and desolated villages in the coolest and airiest manner; but his letter seems all confusion somehow to Editha. Krupp guns, mitrailleuses, skirmishes here, sorties there, the prospect of an engagement before long; French generals, princes of Hohenzollern behaving in the noblest and most gentlemanlike manner, and the general public being annihilated upon scientific principles. Shells, shrapnell, and explosives of all kinds flying about in every direction, even on one's paper as one writes, the correspondent insinuates. To-morrow, and Herman will have reached that horrid scene, and the Krupp guns, the mitrailleuses, the grape and shrapnell will be scattering destruction around his sacred head.

Editha would give anything to see some one who has seen her husband lately—one of his friends, who could tell her, in the absence of his letter, what urged his sudden departure. There is Mrs. Brandreth, for instance; she would be sure to know.

"I will call upon her after church to-morrow," decides Editha. She has never before had her carriage out on a Sunday, but on this occasion she orders the brougham for three o'clock. She has a feeling that Mrs. Brandreth is a person she can only visit in state.

It is not quite pleasant to her to call upon Myra, for though she has never acknowledged the fact even to herself, there is a faint dislike or distrust of that accomplished woman in her mind. But she cannot call upon her husband's bachelor friends—those happy-go-lucky artists or literary men in Thistle-grove or South Kensington—and she is very anxious to see some one who has seen Herman just before his departure; so she vanquishes that undefined feeling of reluctance, and drives to Kensington Gore.

She has been careful to put on her most becoming dress, her prettiest bonnet. Her gloves are fresh; every detail of her toilette perfect. There is nothing of the forsaken Ariadne about her.

This happens to be her first visit to the house in Kensington Gore. She has been asked often, but to Sunday dinners and Sunday musical evenings—symposia she disapproves.

Mrs. Brandreth is at home; indeed she rarely stirs outside her door on Sunday after ten-o'clock matins at a ritualistic temple in the neighbourhood. "A day upon which small tradesmen drive their families about in tax-carts, and large tradesmen's daughters exhibit their fine clothes in Kensington-gardens, is a time for decent people to stay indoors," she remarks, when any one suggests a Sabbath airing.

Mrs. Westray is taken up to the drawing-room—a room that has a cheerful glow winter or summer. The curtains and chair-covers are of a rich amber, the carpet deep brown shaded to palest yellow. These amber tones set off the ebony furniture, the majolica vases and plateaus of turquoise blue, the water-coloured landscapes on the warm dove-coloured walls.

Mrs. Brandreth is seated in the small inner room, among ferns and flowers which give a delicious coolness to the atmosphere. She is not alone. Lord Earlswood lolls upon one of the amber-satin chairs, turning the leaves of the *Connoisseur* languidly, as if he were looking vainly for some article within the limits of his capacity. He spends the greater part of his Sundays in attendance upon Myra. He has very little to say to her, and has no appearance of enjoying himself; but he comes and he stays, and she finds that it is impossible to enjoy a Sunday without this infliction.

Mrs. Brandreth receives Editha rapturously. Lord Earlswood abandons the *Connoisseur*, and shakes hands languidly, with a gentlemanlike melancholy, as a man too deeply afflicted by the burden of life to assume the mockery of smiles.

"My dear Mrs. Westray, how good of you!" cries Myra. "What a pleasant surprise! I thought you were to be in Wales for the next six weeks. Your husband told me so."

Editha explains the tardily-posted letter.

"And you came home and found him gone!" exclaims Myra. "What a disappointment!"

"London so empty too," interjects Lord Earlswood; "positively disgusting. Met seven men between Pall Mall and Whitehall yesterday—I counted 'em. Four of them looked like government clerks, and the other three were parsons. One might as well live in a howling wilderness."

"It was a disappointment to find him gone," replies Editha gently, nay, almost cheerfully. She has not come here to wear the willow. "But if the change does Herman good I must not complain. There is no danger, I suppose?" she adds anxiously, looking at his lordship as the higher authority.

"O dear no, I think not," says Lord Earlswood. "Newspaper correspondents never get shot—not in Europe, you know. In China they shoot all kinds of fellows—diplomatic, civil, anything

you like. But I fancy these French and German beggars will respect the press. Wouldn't like to see themselves cut up in the Radical papers—papers that write about the Millennium, and universal peace, and the lion lying down with the what's-its-name, and that kind of thing."

Editha takes what comfort she can from this speech, and turns to Myra. She has a great opinion of that lady's worldly wisdom, and though she has not been able to like her, respects her industry and cleverness.

"Did you see Herman shortly before he left?" she asks.

"He dined here last Sunday; but he had not then decided on accepting the *Day Star* people's offer, though I know it tempted him."

"And he left on Friday. He must have decided very quickly at last."

"A fellow told me that the *Day Star* doubled their terms," says Lord Earlswood, "and Westray couldn't withstand the filthy lucre."

Editha blushes painfully. That expensive house-keeping is alone to blame for his need of money.

"I do not think money had much to do with Mr. Westray's decision," says Myra. "I believe he wanted change of scene and occupation. He was tired and bored. I never saw him looking so ill. I was one among his friends who advised him to accept the newspaper people's offer. Anything was better than to see him grinding on at the same mill for ever."

This stabs Editha to the heart. She grows a little paler than before, but gives no other token of her wound. Lord Earlswood rises and fidgets about the front drawing-room, only divided from the inner temple by amber curtains. He is seen through the draped archway roaming listlessly, looking at the pictures, opening the show books, generally at a loss what to do with himself.

"Did you hear how long he was to be away?" Editha asks.

"Not definitely. I don't suppose he had any idea as to time. It might be a question of weeks or of months."

"If it is a question of months, I shall go to him," says Editha.

"My dear Mrs. Westray, impossible! A man moving about here and there, at the seat of war—how could he be burdened with a wife? I can quite understand your anxiety, but you will see that in such a position he must be unfettered."

"Yes, I suppose so," Editha answers sadly. "I must be patient. Good-bye, Mrs. Brandreth. I thought you would be able to tell me more perhaps. But I shall get Herman's letter to-morrow."

"You are not going to run away directly? You must stay and

dine with me. I have some charming people coming—an Italian poet and his wife—quite in a friendly way. Lord Earlswood will stay perhaps, and Mr. Tollemey may drop in, but no one else. Do stop.”

“You are very kind; but I am too anxious. I shall be happier at home with baby.”

Myra averts her face lest Mrs. Westray should see the scorn that curls her lip at this remark. Of all things weak in woman Mrs. Brandreth most despises baby-worship.

“You won’t be persuaded? I’m so sorry. And you will go home and drink tea all the evening, and cry over baby, instead of making yourself happy here, as you might if you chose. That is the great difference between men and women. Women nurse their troubles and make much of them; men thrust their worries out of doors, and keep them there until they’re strong enough to climb in at the window.”

Mrs. Westray is not to be persuaded, and departs, feeling very little happier for her visit to Kensington Gore.

“Poor thing,” murmurs Myra languidly, as Lord Earlswood comes prowling through the curtained archway, like a mentally exhausted wild-beast, “how miserable she is!”

If other people’s misfortunes, in a general way, are not without a flavour of sweetness to poor humanity, what wicked rapture must this woman feel as she gloats over the agony of that soul whose happiness she has envied, whose innocence and purity she has hated for two slow joyless years—slow, though they have been as a triumphal procession to the temple of fame; joyless, though they have been filled to overflowing with what the world calls pleasure!

“Yes, she does seem cut up,” replies Lord Earlswood, with a meditative air. “Rather unkind of Westray to go off like that.”

“I daresay he was thoroughly tired of his home, or he wouldn’t have gone.”

“Tired of his home, and with such a pretty wife! I thought it was a love-match.”

“Love-matches are bad wear when a man marries a fool.”

“Is she a fool, do you think? I fancied she had a sensible look. I can’t say I’ve ever heard her say anything clever. She doesn’t burst into puns, and she isn’t satirical, you know. But I should have given her credit for good sense. Looks as if she could make a pudding or sew on a button. Good style too. Carries her head well—doesn’t want a bearing-rein. Well, I’ll go and look in at Tattersall’s, and then go and dress for dinner. I hope these Italian people talk English.”

“Admirably.”

“Jolly clever of them, isn’t it? I never could manage modern

languages. I suppose it's from being over-dosed with the Classics when I was a boy."

"And yet I seldom hear you indulge in Greek or Latin," remarks Myra, smiling.

"No ; nothing so caddish as a fellow quoting Plato or Cicero. Only fit for a newspaper man or an Irish member. *Au plaisir.*" And with this fragment of a modern language, Lord Earlswood departs, to loaf at the great horse-mart for the next hour or so, to smoke a cigar or two, drink a soda-and-brandy or two, yawn over the sporting weeklies, and at eight o'clock reappear in Mrs. Brandreth's drawing-room, faultlessly arrayed in evening dress of puritanical simplicity—no studs, no chain, no trinket—black and white, like a mourning letter.

Relieved of his lordship's unenlivening presence, Mrs. Brandreth paces the larger drawing-room thoughtfully. Her eyes shine with a wicked light. Her rival's misery is very sweet—the wine of life—sweet almost as that cup which the same rival snatched from her lips.

"Revenge is almost as good as love," she tells herself.

She knows a good deal more about Herman than she has chosen to tell Herman's wife. She knows that he has left England because his affairs are in confusion, because he is in desperate need of money, and that let him do his uttermost it will go hard with him to stave off ruin. She knows that the pretty house by the river is a perilous abode just now, and she means to make it more perilous if she can. Hatred so deep as hers is not to be satisfied by the temporary severance of husband and wife. She would see them parted for ever. And far away in the dim future, beyond their parting, Hope beckons boldly.

"He has found out his mistake long ago," she tells herself. "He comes to me for counsel, he comes to me for amusement. That pretty piece of simplicity wearies him. He loved me first—loved me when his heart was young and fresh and ardent. He will love me last."

A Pompadour mirror, framed in Sèvres biscuit, stands before the open window in the full bright sunshine. She catches sight of her face in the glass. O, cruel lines which passion and art have wrought there!—art being with her a kind of spurious passion. That one glance at her own image in the searching sunlight reminds her that she is no longer young.

"But I am famous, and I am rich," she tells herself. "People say I am handsome still ; and in spite of those lines I am not thirty—not too old to be loved again, not too old to be happy."

"Mr. Lyndhurst," announces the servant ; and if the spirit of darkness had been ushered into that amber drawing-room his arrival could not have seemed to Myra more appropriate.

They shake hands with a cordial air—always on the best possible terms, knowing each other so thoroughly, and respecting in each other the highest modern development of the principle of evil.

"Where have you been hiding yourself all this time? And how well you are looking!" exclaims Myra in a breath.

"I have been in Wales."

"Indeed! What part of Wales?"

"Within an hour's drive of Llanthylltydd Priory. My doctor recommended the Llandrysak waters as a wholesome tonic. Mrs. Westray's father has been very civil, and I have enjoyed the sweets of domesticity under his respectable roof."

"You are a most extraordinary man."

"Extraordinary because I go out of the beaten tracks in search of happiness! I have trodden the dusty high roads in the morning of life, and have had enough of the dust and bustle and sunshine. Afternoon has come, and I prefer the shade of silent woods. I did not think it was in my nature to be as happy as I have been at Llanthylltydd."

"What a pity there should be any impediment to your happiness assuming a permanent form! These glimpses of Paradise must be trying to a man of your temperament," says Myra, with a sneer. "What do you think of Mr. Westray having run away from domestic felicity?"

"I heard of it last night at the Agora. Have you any idea as to his reasons for leaving England?"

"I believe he owes more money than he finds it quite convenient to pay, and has some idea of arranging matters with his creditors more easily from a distance. He said something to me about having raised money by a bill of sale on his furniture; but he seemed to apprehend no immediate danger from that."

Hamilton Lyndhurst smiles, a slow, complacent smile.

"Yes, I know something about that bill of sale," he says.

"You don't mean that you—"

"I know the people who hold it. A bad lot, rather. Foolish fellow, Westray, to put himself in the power of that kind of vermin. But your geniuses will hazard ruin in the future to escape trouble in the present. I think our friend Westray has pretty nearly drained his resources. He has had money in advance from his publisher, I know. Rather bad for poor Mrs. Westray if the bill of sale should be acted upon while he is away."

"You mean that it would make her homeless?"

"Precisely."

"She would go back to her father."

"Do you think so? Now I believe she is just the woman whose pride would prevent her doing that. Those high-principled strong-minded women have the pride of Lucifer. No, she has

married for love, and will stand true to her colours through good or ill; or else—”

“Or else what?” asks Myra, as he pauses meditatively.

“Lose her head, and accept the first haven that offers.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

“Your beauty is no beauty to him now:
A common chance—right well I know it—pall’d—
For I know men: nor will you win him back,
For the man’s love once gone never returns.
* * * * *

Why droops my Celia?
Thou hast, in place of a base husband, found
A worthy lover!”

MONDAY morning brings the letter which has been travelling to and fro since Friday—not a long letter or an altogether satisfactory one, but a letter of explanation in some sort, written as if every word had been wrung out of the writer unwillingly.

“You will blame me, dearest, I fear, for the step I am taking,” writes Herman, after a simple announcement of his determination; “but I have reasons—reasons of a purely business nature—which render the act a wise one. First and foremost, I shall make more money in a few weeks than I could earn at home. Secondly, I find myself in actual need of change of scene and occupation. My pen flags, my work grows distasteful to me. I want the revivifying influence of active life.

“I am sorry to say we have not been doing so well this year as I could have wished. The house and stable have run away with more money than I have been able to earn, and we are deeper in debt than I was at all aware till I held a little review of matters the other day. However, we shall tide on somehow, no doubt. Mrs. Brandreth will remit you my share of her profits weekly while I am away; and although the business is not particularly good at this time of year, there will be no doubt enough money to enable you to carry on the war in my absence. I do not know exactly when she means to close the theatre, but I imagine the season will last some time longer. When I come back we will take council together and plan some kind of retrenchment. We might let our house furnished, and live abroad for a year or two. We can at any rate get rid of the carriage and horses, as you proposed. Of course good-natured friends will draw their own conclusions from our economy, and will say that I have lost my

hold upon the public, and that my last books have been failures. I must resign myself to this. After all, what the world says of a man never yet made his finger ache. But how many a heart-ache the slave of opinion gives himself!

"It will be wisest and in every way best for you to remain at the Priory while I am away, dearest. You will be safe there from all possibility of annoyance from importunate creditors, should any of mine take it into their heads to be importunate, which I do not anticipate. The Squire and Ruth will be delighted to have you, the little one will wax fat and strong, and you will be happy among your native hills and your faithful old pensioners, to say nothing of your dear Mr. Petherick; while I shall be happy in knowing that your life is sheltered and serene.

"You shall hear from me as often as possible, and the *Day Star* will give you a detailed account of my adventures. This struggle is more deadly, more appalling, than I can tell you. How small our petty troubles and money difficulties appear before the horrors of scientific warfare! The might and glory of France, that nation which, a few years ago, seemed prosperous and invincible as Rome under Augustus—nay, seemed like a Colossus to bestride and overshadow Europe, are melting like snowflakes in the river,

"A moment seen, then gone for ever.

"God bless you, dear one, and remember that, near or far, absent or present, I am ever your fond and faithful husband,

"HERMAN WESTRAY."

There is comfort in the letter, for it breathes unchanged affection, and that vague fear which has afflicted Editha in the last two days—the fear that she has suffered some lessening of her husband's love—is dispelled by his cordial tenderness. Money difficulties are light as thistledown in the faithful wife's mind. If their need of help were more desperate than she supposes it can be, papa and Ruth would help them. There is a home always for them at Lochwithian. Her own little income—in a worldly woman's estimation barely enough to pay the dressmaker—is a barrier between them and want. She will welcome poverty if it brings about a change in their mode of existence—obliges Herman to dispense with clubs and evening parties, reconciles him perhaps to Welsh retirement: that pretty house and garden on the side of the hill, the waterfall sounding his evening lullaby, the skylark's glad carillon awakening him at morn.

She answers her husband's letter lovingly, dutifully; breathes not a word of reproach, dwells not upon her own griefs, or the sharp pang of disappointment which made her coming home so bitter.

"I should have stayed at Lochwithian had your letter reached me in time, dear Herman," she writes, after tenderest entreaties

that he will be careful of his precious person, run no risk that can possibly be avoided, shun damp beds and shot and shell; "but as I have returned I shall remain here, and see what I can do in my small way towards the lessening of our household expenses. I have given Files a month's wages and sent her about her business, for I have discovered that she is a most extravagant person, and has been cheating us systematically all along. She was quite indignant at having to go, and said she had worked like a galley-slave for us, and that she had never been treated with such ingratitude. It would be a warning to her never again to enter the service of low people who write books. Selina has told me an immense deal about her, which if true is most shocking, and it is a pity Selina had not the courage to tell me while Files was with us. Mary Ann I have also dispatched, as we can manage very well without a parlourmaid; especially if we give fewer dinner-parties in future. The horses and carriages you will of course sell directly you come home. Believe me I shall not feel the loss of them. Nothing would delight me so much as to let our house and live near papa and Ruth for a year or two; but if the idea of life among our hills is disagreeable to you, I should be quite resigned to living abroad; indeed you know that I have travelled so little that a continental life would have all the charm of novelty for me. The narrowing of our circumstances would not distress me in the least, dearest, did I not fear—no, I will be candid, and say did I not know—that my careless housekeeping has impoverished you. I have trusted too much to strange servants; believing that they would be as honest as the dear good creatures who have lived half their lives at the Priory. Ruth has opened my eyes to my folly, and I mean to be a much better housekeeper in future. She has found me a good honest girl as cook, and I hope when you return you will find our expenditure considerably reduced."

Thus cheerily, affectionately, dutifully, writes the wife, without one complaint of the loneliness which weighs very heavily upon her in these bright autumn days, when everyone—including the baker's wife and children and the butcher's small family—is deserting dusty Fulham for shingly beaches and fair stretches of golden sand upon the south-eastern coast, for Margate's crowded jetty, or Pegwell's shrimpy bay. Very long are the days at Bridge-end House, despite Mrs. Westray's endeavours to find respite and forgetfulness from her favourite authors in Herman's study, where she dusts every book, and arranges every nick-nack with loving care. Even that inexhaustible delight, the baby, palls upon her a little in these long days. There are moments when her spirits are not in tune with that glad young babbler, when she has not vitality enough to be a horse or an elephant, or

a wolf, as the exigences of the game demand ; when she lacks even power to tell that elementary story of the boy who was naughty and rebelled against his nurse, or the boy who was good and was largely rewarded with sponge-cake.

Thinking of Herman, fearing for Herman, wondering about Herman—these are the intellectual exercises which fill her empty days. She will not drive in the Park, for she has an uncomfortable feeling that the carriage belongs rather to her husband's creditors than to herself, and that she has no right to the enjoyment of it ; she fancies that angry tradesmen may point at her as she passes by with her high-stepping horses, shining golden-bay in the autumn sunlight. Even the house accounts have fallen into arrear within the last few months. Weekly payments have been superseded by occasional cheques on account, and the result of this system is a heavy balance against Mr. Westray in the books of butcher and grocer, dairyman and baker ; to say nothing of the corn-merchant, who has been rather troublesome of late, and has called more than once to inquire when Mr. Westray will be home.

On the last of these visits, as he puts his question in a loud and angry tone, the study-door opens, and Editha appears, pale and anxious-looking. That sweet sad face is not a reassuring countenance for a creditor to behold.

"Mr. Westray will be home in a few weeks at latest, Mr. Mincer," she says quietly. "I am sorry you should have to wait for your money."

"So am I, ma'am," answers the man gloomily, but in a less savage tone than he had used to the maid just now. "I've got a heavy bill to make up, and I want Mr. Westray's money for it. I thought I was safe enough in letting his account run—that my money was as good as if it was in the bank. But money in the bank's no use if you can't get it when you want it. That's where it is, you see, ma'am. Your coachman sends round to me for two quarter of oats and half a load of hay this morning, as cool as you please ; but I ain't a-going to supply nothink more without the money."

"You shall have the money, then, Mr. Mincer. The horses must be fed while we have them. You shall be paid ready money for everything in future. If you'll send me a bill with the things that my coachman ordered it shall be paid on delivery."

"Well, ma'am, you can't say fairer than that, as far as it goes," replies the corn-merchant, softened, if not satisfied. "But I should be very glad of fifty pound on account to help meet that bill. *My* creditors won't wait. It's a dull time of the year, too ; some of the best of my customers has sent their horses out to grass while they're at the seaside. And I make no doubt this

war will send up the price of oats awful. And when oats goes up horses is put down—leastways that's my experience."

Home without Herman, and with this shadow of debt hanging over it like a pall, is home no longer. Editha's spirits sink to their lowest ebb. She is full of fears for Herman in the present. Cheerily as she writes to him, she is not without fear for him in the future. She knows not what ruin may be descending upon him, what power exasperated creditors may have to assail and injure him, what disgrace insolvency may not involve—his honour, his good name, perhaps, for ever forfeited by the imprudence of the last two years.

Of poverty in the abstract this fond wife has no terror. She can fancy no lot sweeter than humble fortune with the man she loves—an existence narrowed by narrow means to simplest domesticity; a life spent among the hills and woods and quiet villages of Wales, far from all that makes life costly. But the shame of debts unpaid is horrible to her mind. That brief interview with the disappointed corn-merchant was sharpest agony.

Her two servants, the nursemaid Jane and housemaid Selina, behave very well at this juncture, as servants generally do in time of trouble. They know that a cloud lowers upon the house, and are curiously gentle and sympathetic, compassionating the young mistress who has never spoken an unkind word to them, and secretly angry with their master for his absence in this time of embarrassment. Selina even deigns to keep the kitchen clean unassisted by a charwoman.

So time slips on for ten days. Herman's letters appear almost daily in the *Day Star*, full of life and sparkle, graphic description, and sharp observation, which delight the readers of the great journal. Editha reads them with tears in her eyes. How clever he is! what vigour, what vivacity in his writing! And how happy he seems amidst the bustle and excitement of war—how unconscious of danger, how indifferent to deprivation!

Ten days, which seem like ten weeks. Editha has hardly stirred from the house since her Sunday-afternoon call at Mrs. Brandreth's. A little walk in the garden with baby is her only exercise. The leaves are beginning to change colour already; a few of the earliest fall across her path as she walks. Steamers crowded with happy Cockneys come aground in the twilight, or go puffing and panting triumphantly by, as if they never had been known to get aground in their lives and were incapable of doing it. The noble expanse of Thames mud has a melancholy look at low tide. The lights of Putney twinkle less cheerily than of old. Dismal hour betwixt day and night, when it is too light for lamps or candles, and the evening gray is peopled with saddest thoughts.

It is in this dreary pause between light and darkness that the first note of ruin sounds in Editha's ears. She is walking in the garden after her solitary tea-dinner, looking hopelessly at the darkening river and thinking of the good days gone—the first spring and summer of her wedded life, when the world seemed full of joy. A stealthy-sounding footstep startles her, and she turns suddenly. It is only Selina, coming towards her with a cautious step and a scared expression of countenance.

"O, if you please, ma'am, there's a gentleman and a man wants to see you; and I'm afraid it's something wrong, for they said something about taking possession of the place."

"What do you mean, Selina?"

"Well, I'm afraid, ma'am, they're something in the way of bailiffs. My last master but one was subject to bailiffs; they used to come in once in three months as regular as the water-rate; and these have azackly the same look. I don't know whether it's the cut of their clothes, or the way they wear their 'ats, or the oiliness of their complexions, but you may pretty well know 'em anywheres."

Editha has a vague idea that bailiffs are the bandogs of the fiend Debt, but hasn't the faintest notion as to the working of the institution.

She goes quietly to meet her doom, whatever it may be. In the dining-room she finds a large and florid gentleman, with a nose, a beard, two black side-curls of the Newgate-knocker pattern, and a demonstrative watch-chain. This gentleman is seated in an easy attitude on the corner of the dining-table. His humble companion stands aloof, hat in hand. The hat is greasy of aspect, and overflows with a large red-cotton handkerchief. This lowly follower of the doomsman has a deprecatory expression of countenance, as of one accustomed to be despised—one to whom the process of being kicked out of doors is not positively unknown.

The florid gentleman with the watch-chain is elaborately civil. He explains in a *débonnaire* way the motive of his intrusion. There is a little bill of sale on Mr. Westray's furniture—quite a friendly thing; but even between friends business is business, and must be arranged in a business-like manner. The amount is eleven hundred and odd pounds, and in the event of Mrs. Westray not being ready to pay that sum, the *débonnaire* gentleman is here to take possession of the aforesaid furniture by his minion, the man with the sleek hat.

"I think it will be more agreeable for all parties for me to leave the man," says the pleasant-spoken gentleman. "It will give you and Mr. Westray time to look about you. You'll find Cruncher the quietest creature. Give him a corner to sit in—

the back-kitchen, or the scullery if you like; let him smoke his pipe; give him his victuals regular—he's rather a heavy feeder, Cruncher—and he'll be as happy as the day is long. There isn't a more harmless fellow going. You won't know he's in the house."

The sheriff's officer having inducted his representative, takes a gracious leave of Mrs. Westray, whose beauty has evidently impressed his sensitive nature. He lingers a little to admire the Pompeian dining-room, and is elaborately civil, with a shade of friendliness which offends Editha's pride. She tells Selina to show the gentleman out in the midst of his panegyric on her taste of upholstery.

"Pity to break up such a tasty place!" he says; "but no doubt Mr. Westray will find it easy to settle this little affair. A gentleman so popular with the public can't have much difficulty in finding a thousand or so. Nice thing that last play of his at the Frivolity! I went to see it three times. That Mrs. Brandreth's a stunner!"

Editha turns her back upon the man with a shudder. She feels as if some particularly loathsome member of the flat-headed snake tribe had crawled into her once-happy home. The door closes on the well-dressed executor of the law; but the humbler bandog remains, still standing meekly just inside the dining-room door, sleeking that oleaginous hat of his with his moist palm.

"O Selina, what are we to do?" exclaims Editha hopelessly. If the officers of doom had come to convey her by water to her Majesty's Tower, to languish in some stony cell till she was brought out to die, she could feel no deeper despair. "What are we to do with that horrid man?" she asks piteously.

"Lor, ma'am, you needn't trouble about him," replies Selina cheerily; "leave him to me. *They're* manageable enough, poor things! I'll give him a bit of cold Irish stew for supper, and let him sit with me and Jane. He looks a harmless creature, though he might be cleaner."

"I don't suppose there is any harm in him," says Editha, almost in tears; "but to think of his being in the same house with baby."

Selina tells the law's minion to follow her down-stairs. She speaks to him sharply and authoritatively, as if he had been some dilapidated old person hired to clean the boots, and he obeys submissively, feeling himself very low down upon the social ladder.

Editha goes up to the nursery, and has her boy's crib brought down to her own room. The nurse can make up a bed for herself in the adjacent dressing-room, so as to be close at hand. If that shabby old man lurking in the basement were a member of the vampire tribe, and likely to prowl up-stairs after midnight intent on sucking her infant's blood, Mrs. Westray could hardly

dread him more than she does. She is a little more easy in her mind when young Herman's crib is established beside her bed, the baby lips moving softly in placid sleep. With the door of her bedroom locked on the inside, and the nurse keeping guard in the dressing-room, she feels that her darling is safe. This is her citadel; here even debt can hardly assail her.

She looks round at the bright pretty furniture with a sigh. To think that any one else—some low common man, perhaps—should hold a legal instrument giving him power to seize upon these things, to devastate this tasteful home, to send his grimy custodian into her house, there to squat toad-like till the law's delay be ended and the hour of ruin come! What is to be done? she asks herself by-and-by, when her spirits are a little calmer. That good girl Selina has brought her a cup of tea, and has comforted her with the assurance that the man in possession is a very decent sort of person, and is making himself agreeable down-stairs.

"I've made him up a bed in the housekeeper's room, ma'am; for I thought you wouldn't like to have him up-stairs," says the thoughtful Selina.

"How good you are!" is all Editha can reply.

"Lor, ma'am, I can't bear to see you in trouble! Such a kind mistress as you've been, never interfering, nor nothing! I'm sure I should have upped and told you about Mrs. Files giving away the victuals, if I'd thought you couldn't afford to be cheated; but seeing you and master so careless like, I fancied it didn't matter. And it's so unpleasant for one servant to tell upon another."

"You are a good girl, Selina, and I hope you'll stay with me wherever we go. We must be more careful in future; for you see we are poor people. My income is a very small one, and your master has to work for his living."

"Writing books," says Selina, with a dubious air; "that seems easy work enough, as long as the thoughts come into your head. But it must make his hand ache holding the pen so long, I should think. I've often wondered he doesn't have an amanuensis."

Trouble makes the kindly Selina a shade familiar, but she means well. She runs down-stairs to fetch nurse's supper, that custodian of infancy being no more permitted to leave her sleeping charge than if she were set to watch an alembic in which carbon was crystallising into diamond.

Editha stands at the window looking at the moonlit river—very beautiful now—shore and tree and tower all glorified by the moon. She tries to think what is to be done—how money is to be found to pay this unknown creditor who holds dominion over her household treasures. To let the house furnished, or

to remove the furniture to a smaller and less expensive house, would be only retrenchment, and she could submit to the change without a pang. But to see these goods and chattels taken forcible possession of by a creditor, would mean ignominy.

Upwards of eleven hundred pounds! Can she ask her father for such a sum? No, that is impossible. She knows that the Squire finds it as much as he can do to maintain that large household at the Priory; to find money for repairs and necessary improvements; to keep his estate and all appertaining thereto in fit order, to be transferred by and by to his eldest son. He has to help his sons, who have large families and small professional incomes. No, pride and good feeling alike forbid any appeal to her father. She has married the husband of her choice; she has disappointed the Squire's dearest hopes by that marriage. Only the other day he spoke regretfully, reproachfully even, of her refusal of Vivian Hetheridge. No, she cannot ask her father for eleven hundred pounds, even if there were any likelihood of his having such a sum at his disposal. Ruth's income is like her own, something less than two hundred a year from trust money under her mother's settlement, not to be anticipated or disposed of; so there can be no help from Ruth. These two people make Mrs. Westray's little world. She has no one else to look to.

"Perhaps Herman will be able to raise the money quite easily when he comes home," she thinks, more hopefully.

She writes him a long letter that night, telling him what has happened, and entreating him to return as soon as possible. She has thoughts of telegraphing to him, but on deliberation prefers the slower mode of a letter. A telegram with such unpleasant news might be too severe a shock. She would spare him pain if possible.

The night drags itself through, sleepless for Editha. She lies broad awake, thinking of these new difficulties—money difficulties, unknown to her hitherto. Morning comes with its garish light and the accustomed household sounds. She rises a little later than usual, too hopeless almost to face the day's dull round. Baby has been crawling over her more or less since six o'clock, playing at wild beasts on the pillow, and making a lion's den of the curtains. Selina brings her a cup of tea, and the agreeable tidings that the "old gentleman" has slept very well, and has eaten the best part of a half-quartern loaf and two Yarmouth bloaters for breakfast.

Anon comes the excitement of baby's bath, with various aquatic and acrobatic performances attendant thereupon, splashings and climbings and somersaults on his nurse's lap; baby's breakfast; and then nurse and baby sally forth for a promenade in the episcopal garden; baby enthroned in his perambulator;

nurse in a newly-starched gown, and something brilliant in the bonnet line. Editha is alone, and will be alone till baby's dinner-time. She goes down to Herman's study, her chosen retreat, and tries to find solace in his books.

She opens a volume of Sir Thomas Browne, and reads listlessly for a little while, and anon seeks comfort in one of Taylor's sermons. How calmly they philosophised, these sages and clerics of old, as if trouble or sorrow never came near them. save as a subject for meditation, a thesis to write upon! Did they ever know real heartache? she wonders. These meditators upon tombstones, these anatomisers of melancholy, or even this prince of eloquence, the Cambridge barber's son, Jeremy Taylor, who tries to philosophise the sting out of sorrow and death. To-day in her own depth of anguish, it seems to Editha as if these sages were chiefly intent on the exhibition of their learning and the stately march of their sentences.

"Let me read some one who has suffered," she says impatiently, closing Burton's famous treatise—one of the books that always lies on Herman's writing table, side by side with Montaigne and La Bruyère—and taking down Charles Lamb. The tenderness, the bright humour soothe her. For nearly an hour she forgets her cares. How gaily he wrote, whose life was so full of sadness! what sweetness he drew from smallest pleasures! How exquisite his appreciation of tranquil domestic joys! A choice old book picked up at a stall, a china teacup, a friendly rubber, an act of gracious unpretending charity, an exercise of unselfish hospitality to a needy acquaintance. Sweet Elia, the world gave thee so little, and thou hast given the world so much!

The ringing of the hall-door bell startles Editha from the enjoyment of her book. She hears a masculine voice, and then Selina opens the study-door and announces Mr. Lyndhurst.

Editha's pale face crimsones as he enters. Not for worlds would he have one of Herman's friends aware of his degradation, and she has a dim idea that the presence of the man in possession must make itself felt in the house a kind of social malaria.

"I am lucky in finding you at home on such a fine day," says Mr. Lyndhurst, after the usual greetings.

"Not especially lucky; I am almost always at home."

Mr. Lyndhurst remembers a certain familiar story of a peerless matron spinning among her maids when the fatal visitor came. Domesticity does not always mean safety.

"Westray not yet returned from the seat of war?"

"Not yet," she answers, with a sigh.

"And you have no definite announcement of his coming?"

"No; but I expect him soon."

"Indeed. I should have thought he would have stayed to

see the upshot of this business, and I fear it will hang long on hand. It must be interesting work. Do you remember my telling you he was likely to accept the *Day Star* people's offer, when we were in Wales? You thought he would not, but I was right, you see. I knew him best."

"Perhaps you knew his necessities better than I did," replies Editha, with dignity. That anybody should pretend to be her superior in knowledge of her husband's character is not to be endured.

"Well, yes, perhaps that was it. I knew that he had difficulties to contend with just at that time."

"I am glad that he went," says Editha cheerfully. She feels that to seem despondent would be to betray the secret of that Frankenstein in the basement.

"He writes in excellent spirits. The change will do him good; and when he comes back, I have reason to hope that he will consent to our going to live in the country. There is a house near Lochwithian—I showed it to you one day, by-the-bye—which I have set my heart upon making our home."

"For a fortnight?"

"For always. With an occasional visit to London, of course."

"My dear Mrs. Westray, your husband would be melancholy mad after the first month. He has not what Bulwer Lytton calls the rural temperament. He is dependent upon society for his pleasures. He likes books well enough as a means, but learning is not the end of his life. He likes men and women better than books, and is more an observer than a thinker. His well-spring of invention would run dry if you took him away from the clubs! his fountain of imagination would cease to flow if you shut him out of the theatres. In a word, he is not a literary creator, but a literary photographer."

"I am sorry his friend should rank him so low," exclaims Editha, wounded.

"My candour offends you, yet I meant to praise. What can be a happier exercise of genius than to supply the want of one's age? The desire of our age is to see itself in a glass. We have exploded the historical novel, the legendary novel, the romantic novel. We don't want Greeks or Romans, Saxons or Crusaders. We want ourselves—our literature, to please us, must be about ourselves; our plays, to amuse us, must represent ourselves; our pictures, to be popular, must show us ourselves. Imagine a new Southey sitting down to write *Roderick* or *Thalaba*; imagine a publisher's feelings on having the poem offered him. Your husband respects the inclination of his age and writes of men and women he knows. Take him away from his models, and you cause the decay of his art. He will be writing from memory instead of following the inspiration of the hour."

"Perhaps you are right," replies Editha, with a sigh; "but I am not ready to admit as much. I should like Herman to turn his back upon this human kaleidoscope, London Society, and draw upon his imagination. If Scott had given us nothing but life in Princes-street, Edinburgh, he would not have held a large place in our minds. And then I have Herman's health and happiness to consider as well as his success as a writer. He was looking ill when I left him to go to Lochwithian, and I know he has been overworked."

"There may be other causes as well as overwork," says Lyndhurst thoughtfully. "I believe Westray has been worried of late."

"He has had anxieties about money matters, perhaps," says Editha, with a troubled look.

"I was not thinking of those."

"Of what then? O Mr. Lyndhurst, pray speak plainly! If you have the knowledge of anxieties which my husband, from mistaken kindness, conceals from me, do not hesitate to let me know the worst. Nothing could make me more unhappy than to know I had not shared his trouble."

"There may be trouble which it is impossible for you to share—trouble which I have no right to speak about in your hearing. Do not draw me on to say too much, Mrs. Westray. Respect for you, sympathy with you, may make me false to my friend."

"That cannot possibly be. I have no interest apart from my husband."

"Of course not; let us say no more," replies Lyndhurst, with an embarrassed manner which puzzles and troubles Editha.

"Now I know that you are hiding something from me, Mr. Lyndhurst," she exclaims eagerly; "I can see it in your face and manner. Something has happened since I left London; you know of some trouble that has come upon my husband, or that threatens him. If it is a money trouble only, perhaps I know as much as you; but if it is anything else, anything worse—"

"Come, then, I'll trust you," replies Lyndhurst, as if moved by a sudden gush of honest feeling, "at the risk of seeming a traitor to my friend. Yet I shall be no traitor, for he has never confided in me. All I know is the result of observation and of accident: your husband is in danger."

"In what danger?" cries Editha, alarmed.

"In danger of sinning against you beyond recall; in danger of bartering home, peace, happiness, honour, for an unprincipled woman's smiles; in danger of delivering himself over, bound hand and foot, to his first love, Myra Brandreth."

"His first love!"

She repeats the words slowly, pale as death, looking at Hamilton Lyndhurst with horror's steadfast gaze.

"His first love!" she says again. "He never loved her, never knew her till she acted in his plays. He cares nothing for her—except as a clever actress, able to carry out his ideas."

"Did he not—does he not? O Mrs. Westray, you have indeed been hoodwinked! Did he not tell you? Well, I suppose it's the fashion to leave these things dark: yet I thought when a man married it was incumbent upon him to let his wife know something of his past."

"I knew that Herman was engaged to a woman who was false to him."

"But you did not know that the jilt was Mrs. Brandreth. He did not tell you the Devonshire idyl in full—did not tell you that he and Colonel Clitheroe's daughter were children together, plighted lovers before they were out of their teens, and that adverse circumstances, or in other words empty pockets, alone parted them. Those half confidences are a mistake. Had you known all, your woman's wit would have found some means of keeping him out of reach of his first love—false to him, but never forgetful of him."

"Had I known all, I should have been no more afraid of Mrs. Brandreth's influence on my husband than I am now," replies Editha, struggling proudly with that aching heart of hers.

"My dear Mrs. Westray, that is what every true woman says at the first blush. But if I did not think you superior both in sense and courage to the generality of women, I should never have ventured to approach this most painful subject. I like Westray, and I don't like to see him going headlong to his ruin. I revere you, and I cannot stand by to see you wronged. I am a man of the world, and I look at these things from a worldly point of view. Your husband's too evident devotion to Mrs. Brandreth does not horrify me as it would your brother the clergyman. He would be for going straight off to the lawyers and asking for a judicial separation. I look upon the whole thing as a social mistake—one of those follies which shipwreck lives, because there is seldom any one with courage to speak plainly either to the sinner or the sinned against. I have spoken very plainly to your husband, but he has laughed at my advice. I take a bolder course now, and venture to call your attention to this rock ahead which threatens your domestic peace."

"I am willing to believe that you mean well by this interference, Mr. Lyndhurst," Editha replies calmly, "but I must tell you that I consider your remarks as insulting to me as they are to my husband. If I have lost my hold upon his affection, which I do not for a moment believe, I doubt whether any advice of yours would enable me to regain it; I would rather trust to my own heart, my own instinct, in such a case as that. My hus-

band's liking for Mrs. Brandreth's society results only from his love of dramatic art ; she is able to advise him about the construction of his plays, her technical knowledge is of use to him—"

"And out of sheer gratitude he writes her love-letters," interrupts Lyndhurst scornfully. "Mrs. Westray, I cannot see you so blinded by affection for a man who at his best is unworthy of you. Think me cruel, dishonourable—what you will : I must speak plainly. I picked up the torn half of a letter in Myra Brandreth's boudoir the day before I left London for Wales, and kept it, half disposed to show it you, yet doubtful whether it were not better to keep the secret. But when I see you so deluded, so confident in a bad man—"

"Show me the letter, sir, and spare me your criticism. When my husband's honour is in question, I had rather judge for myself."

"You will forgive me for the pain I inflict?"

"Forgive you? Do you suppose I think of *you* for a moment? Give me the letter."

He takes a letter from his breast-pocket, selecting it from half a dozen others, and hands it to her slowly, with a slight hesitation of manner, as if at the last moment he were doubtful whether he should let her see it.

There is the thick square envelope directed in the hand she knows so well, and inside it half a sheet of Bath post, torn unevenly from the letter of which it has formed a part.

For some moments Editha can hardly see the words. She turns abruptly away from Mr. Lyndhurst, unwilling that he should discover how weak she is, and then, steadying herself with an effort, reads the following lines in her husband's hand :

"So, after weighing all circumstances deliberately, I can see only one chance of happiness for me and you, and that lies in reunion. We were foolish when we parted ; we should be worse than foolish to remain asunder now that we have discovered, once for all, how utterly dependent we are upon each other for happiness. Without you life for me loses all zest, all charm ; ambition is a word of no meaning. Consider this, dearest, and decide. You need fear no repetition of past mistakes in the future. I know my own heart now, and know that it cannot change. It is yours now, as it has been yours always. Every other dream was delusive. I shall go away in order that you may make your election deliberately. If you decide, as I hope and believe you will decide, you can join me in my exile, the time and place to be agreed upon when your heart has spoken as to our future."

This is all. The lines fill only half the page. There is neither signature nor date.

"This letter to which you seem to attach so much importance

is unsigned," Editha says, after slowly reading those cruel lines, which seem to her like the death-warrant of her happiness.

"I don't think any signature is necessary for its identification," replies Lyndhurst coolly; "there can be no doubt as to the identity of the writer."

"I am not so sure of that. People write so much alike nowadays."

"Sublime hypocrisy," thinks Lyndhurst; "she will pretend to believe black is white rather than condemn her husband."

"However, I will show my husband the letter when he comes home, and ask him how it came to be written. I have no doubt I shall find it means something very different from what you suppose."

"When he comes home," echoes Lyndhurst, with a sneer, dropping the tone of sympathising friend and honest open-minded counsellor. "Do you believe, in the face of that letter, that he will ever come home? Can you doubt that this war-correspondent business was a planned thing—a subtle scheme to make escape easy; to bridge over an awkward interval and lessen the scandal of his desertion of you? Mrs. Brandreth will join him when her theatre closes; she cannot afford to leave London sooner. To-night is the last of the season, by-the-bye. She will be free to-morrow."

Editha listens horror-stricken. Delirium could imagine no wilder dream than this waking agony. Coldly, quietly, in those tranquil legato tones, Hamilton Lyndhurst makes manifest her husband's perfidy. He has gone back to his first love. His heart has never really belonged to his wife. This Myra Brandreth, clever, brilliant, fascinating, famous, has never lost her hold upon him.

Can such infamy be? She looks down at that shameless letter—that bold avowal of guilty passion—and the answer is obvious. His own hand condemns him.

"Mrs. Brandreth's life has been spotless hitherto," she says, striving to be calm, stifling that bitter cry of anguish which is ready to burst from her lips. "She has preserved her good name in the midst of temptation. I cannot believe that she will disgrace herself by a shameful flight, even," she adds slowly, recovering self-possession in some degree, "even if this letter of Herman's means what it seems to mean, which I do not for a moment admit."

"My dear Mrs. Westray, if that letter be not evidence, I don't know what evidence is. As for Mrs. Brandreth, she has had very good cards to play, and has played them remarkably well. She has won distinction and made money; she has repelled Earlswood's advances, and yet kept him her adorer. But you forget the power of love. Open the floodgates of passion, and worldly

wisdom is swept away by the torrent. Love that stops to reason or counts the cost of a sacrifice is no love at all."

"If my husband is false to me, if his love has been alienated or he has never loved me, I cannot discuss my sorrow with you, Mr. Lyndhurst. I suppose I ought to thank you for having opened my eyes to this most bitter truth, but—"

Her voice trembles, the words are stifled by a convulsive throbbing in her throat; she makes one heroic effort to control her grief, and then breaks down altogether, and sobs aloud.

"Mrs. Westray—Editha," says Lyndhurst, pale with suppressed passion. Vile as the man is he pities her—pities her as he would pity his horse or dog in mortal agony, his heart wrung as if by absolute pain. "Editha, if this man had been false only, I should have spared you this revelation; but he has been heartless as well. He leaves you hemmed in with difficulties, leaves you under the shadow of disgrace. Yes, I know all; the news of our friends' troubles fly on the wings of the wind; every one in your husband's circle knows. This house is no fitting shelter for you, a shelter from which you may be driven at any hour. And he leaves you homeless, penniless—"

"That is not true," interrupts Editha haughtily. "He has left me amply provided with ready money."

"But not with money to pay his debts."

"That may have been impossible."

"No doubt, and he planned his flight accordingly. He has known for some time that his difficulties were approaching a crisis, and he considered that crisis the fittest occasion for breaking free from all bonds, matrimonial as well as social."

"I will not hear his conduct discussed; I will not allow motives to be ascribed to him. Even if I know him to be a sinner, I will not accept your judgment of his sin."

"But you must, you shall, hear me out," returns Lyndhurst, bending over her with a look whose intensity startles her with a sudden terror. There is meaning in that look which even her innocence cannot misunderstand. Passion burns in those dark eyes and clouds that stern brow. "I came here to save you from humiliation, to offer you true love instead of sham love—the love of a man who would peril all that men hold highest to win one smile from you. Editha, I have loved you from the first; your noble face flashed upon me like a revelation more than two years ago. I have lived a new life since then, for my life has had a purpose. I have watched and waited for this hour, knowing that, soon or late, it must come. You have not understood me; you have been as blind to my love as you have been to your husband's growing indifference, his preference for another. It is well that you should know both at once. I love you as no

woman—even the best and loveliest—is loved more than once in her life ; love you steadfastly, unselfishly, unalterably. Granted that my past life has not been blameless, yet it is no profligate's fleeting passion that I offer you, but a strong man's awakening to pure and perfect love. Trust your future to me, my beloved, and it shall be the brightest destiny that love and wealth ever made for the idol of a man's heart. Our modern law makes release from an unhappy marriage possible. Trust yourself to me, dearest, and in a few months I may call you wife. Till that blessed day comes I ask only to be your champion and defender, your slave to obey and honour your lightest wish."

Editha hears him to the end, hears him with a blank stare of amazement, which changes slowly to a disdainful smile.

"Is this *all* you have to say ?" she asks at last, with provoking calmness.

"I could plead my cause to the end of time, but all is told when I tell you I am your slave," he answers with an uneasy smile. That deliberate question of Editha's is worse than the most stormy repulse. Her tones, her looks alike pronounce the fatal truth. He has made not the faintest impression on her heart. The fool loves her fickle husband still.

Mrs. Westray rings the bell. Happily the faithful Selina, now maid-of-all-work, does not happen to have her hands entangled in a floury pudding, or to be washing dishes at a greasy sink, and therefore appears promptly.

"The door, Selina," says Editha. Indignation has stifled grief. There is hardly a trace of tears upon the pale proud face.

Selina opens the hall-door, distant about two yards from that of the study, and Hamilton Lyndhurst, the millionaire, the invincible, the Rochester of the Stock Exchange, knows himself ignominiously dismissed.

He strolls up Fulham's old-fashioned High-street with an imperturbable countenance, but the vulture is at work within. Never before has he set his heart upon any prize and failed to win it. He has aimed high this time, it is true, but he has been patient, and deems himself worthy of reward. Anger for the moment is dominant over every other feeling. The hardest words in his vocabulary are not bitter enough for the woman who has scorned him.

"I am not beaten yet," he tells himself. "Love is never so strong as when it goes hand in hand with revenge. I will trample her pride in the dust. She shall be the sovereign lady of my life, or husbandless, homeless, nameless, and degraded."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"I have lived long enough, having seen one thing, that love hath an end."

THE revelation of Hamilton Lyndhurst's baseness is a shock from which Editha does not easily recover. She has trusted him and believed in him as her husband's friend—the kindly visitor whose presence has brought cheerfulness to her fireside. She has liked him and Ruth has liked him, and been solaced by his genius. She remembers those placid hours at Lochwithian with a shudder, feeling as if she had cherished a serpent unawares. Her womanly pride is outraged by the idea that any man—the most daring—should presume to speak as Hamilton Lyndhurst has spoken to her.

"Do I seem the kind of woman to listen to such a proposal?" she asks herself. "I, Herman's wife?"

But deeper than this natural shame, more bitter than outraged purity, is the fact of Herman's falsehood. That changes life and the world. Hope has fled for ever. How petty, how transient appear all her previous cares when weighed against this overwhelming sorrow! To know that she has lost his love, or never really possessed it, were bitter enough, but far worse, for a lofty mind, is the knowledge that the man she loves is treacherous, false, and cowardly; that he has abandoned her in the hour of trouble, leaving for her the burden of debt, poverty, and disgrace, while he woos another to share his shameful exile.

"I could have endured beggary with him without a murmur!" she exclaims piteously. And then again and again she pores over that hideous page which tells his treachery. Words so deliberate, so audacious in their infamy. Not one syllable of self-upbraiding, not one gush of pity for his forsaken wife.

"Yet he would hardly have written my name in such a letter," she thinks, with a touch of pride. "I ought to thank him for having spared me such an insult."

If she could, by any straining of her senses, think this paper a forgery; if she could believe that the words had any other meaning than their obvious significance, she would too gladly take refuge in that belief. She would doubt in spite of herself, if there were room for doubt. But there is none. The hand is Herman's. She knows every trick of his writing as well as she knows her own face in the glass. The words will bear only one interpretation.

Selina, coming in with a luncheon tray, is startled by her mistress's white face.

"Lor, mum, how gashly pale you do look, to be sure! I hope that gentleman didn't bring you no bad news."

"He told me that people know of our disgrace already. That seems hard."

"Meaning the elderly gentleman down-stairs? Lor, mum, you needn't go to fret about that. Bailiffs are common enough. My last master but one thought no more of a man in possession than of the chimney-sweep. He used to come a'most as regular."

Baby comes home at this juncture, fresh and blooming after a long morning out of doors, and Editha has to assist at the young gentleman's dinner. He has lately been promoted to the dignity of a mutton-chop, instead of the beef-teas and panadas of infancy, and to cut up this chop into minutest portions, to watch the child dispose of the same, and to amuse him while he dines, have been hitherto Mrs. Westray's most agreeable occupations. To-day the wounded heart refuses to be comforted even by baby. The nurse is dismissed to her leisurely dinner in the kitchen, the mother performs her customary duties; but the task is done mechanically. The child looks up at her with vague wonder in his large round eyes. He misses the tender voice that has been wont to discourse sweet nonsense to him. He stares at his mother fixedly for a few moments, and then, scared by her rigid countenance, bursts into a dismal howl.

That cry recalls Editha to her duty. She clasps the little fellow to her breast, and hot tears rain down upon him.

"My darling, my precious one, my fatherless baby!" she sobs. And then composing herself, sets to work to console and reassure the little one, and anon woos him to the discussion and enjoyment of his mutton-chop.

The baby's love is sweet to this young mother even in her despair, but not a healing balm for those aching wounds of hers. He loves her, this little one, she thinks, almost wonderingly; for it seems somewhat strange to her that she should inspire love in any one, having failed to keep Herman's affection—failed though she has given all things, failed though she has well-nigh fallen into the sin of idolatry.

She has her father's calm easy-going affection still, and Ruth's deep love. Are not these things something? Alas, her home life, all the joy and peace of her days before she knew Herman, seem to her far away—almost too remote for memory, as if they had belonged to her in a different state of being! She can draw no comfort from the thought of home and home-love to-day.

Will Ruth and the Squire come to know of Herman's falsehood? That question presents itself to Editha's mind as a new horror. How long shall she be able to hide his degradation—to keep the secret of his guilt? Not long, she fears. Those who

love her so well will be curious about her fate. They will discover her husband's desertion, and she will have to endure their anger against him, their scornful wonder at his baseness.

Every day will add to her burden. For such a grief as hers there is no comforter but Death.

Even this afternoon come fresh worries, small annoyances, like the carrion flies that sting some maimed wretch broken on the wheel. The neighbouring traders have found out somehow that the storm has burst on Bridge-end House. They send in their little accounts, and wait for answers to their applications. They are insolent and importunate. Summonses come fluttering down, like the big drops that fall before a tempest—water-rates, poor-rates, gas-accounts. Though Mr. and Mrs. Westray have spent so much ready money, they seem in debt for everything.

Editha's horror of the house grows upon her as these assaults become more numerous, and she finally determines on flight. She will take nurse and baby with her, and retire to some quiet little lodging up at Wimbledon, where they may live at least unassailed by insolent creditors, where she will feel herself secure from the possibility of any farther intrusion on the part of Mr. Lyndhurst. No one but Selina shall know the secret of her retreat.

She consults that faithful girl as to the step, and Selina concurs in its advisability.

"Anything will be better for you than being worried to death here, mum," says Selina. "I can have the charwoman to keep me company. Her husband's out of work, and she'll come for the sake of a good meal of victuals, and glad. And I can bring you up any letters as may come, of an evening. It will be a walk for me."

Mrs. Westray has a few pounds of her own, and an unbroken ten-pound note, part of the sum sent her by Mrs. Brandreth's treasurer last Saturday. The ten pounds she will leave with Selina. Her own slender purse will serve for maintenance at Wimbledon. The first thing to be done is to find a comfortable lodging, and she determines upon driving up to the village on the hill to-morrow. She can leave the carriage at some way-side inn and go on foot to hunt for her lodging, so that her coachman may not be able to inform any one of her whereabouts by-and-by.

How hateful—how dear—the house that has been the scene of her brief wedded life seems to her! Hateful from the horror that has fallen upon it—dear for its memories of happy days. She takes up Herman's scattered books one by one and kisses them.

"Ah, dearest, I have loved you too fondly," she says, "and you have grown tired of my love. It has seemed so common a thing—given unasked, given without measure."

She remembers a passage in *Devereux* which she and Herman discussed one happy evening by the study-fire.

"The deadliest foe to love is not change, nor misfortune, nor jealousy, nor wrath, nor anything that flows from passion, or emanates from fortune. The deadliest foe to love is *custom*."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"I know

I shall die as my fathers died, and sleep as they sleep ; even so.
For the glass of the years is brittle wherein we gaze for a span ;
A little soul for a little bears up this corpse which is man.
So long I endure, no longer ; and laugh not again, neither weep.
For there is no God found stronger than death ; and death is a sleep."

It is the last night of the season at the Frivolity Theatre. All the best people, and a good many insignificant people, nay, perhaps, not a few of the worst people, have left London on their autumnal migrations, and it would be quite absurd for Mrs. Brandreth to waste her sweetness on an unfashionable town. The house is crowded on this last night, though the recess is to be only of about six weeks' duration. Wonders are promised for next season—a new actor, a new actress, a new play by that eminently successful author Herman Westray ; renovation, decoration.

People who have been intending to see Herman's comedy ever since its production flock to the little theatre to-night, to snatch their last chance of seeing it at all. The house looks brilliant, though the best people are all gone.

Between nine and ten o'clock Hamilton Lyndhurst strolls into Lord Earlswood's box. His lordship has gone to Norway for a month's fishing. Mr. Lyndhurst is pale and weary looking. He is recognised by some of the men in the stalls, who begin to talk about him mysteriously.

"How ill Lyndhurst looks !" remarks one. "I hope there's nothing amiss with that Bolivian loan."

"Don't think it would make any difference to him if there was," answers his neighbour. "He never gets hit."

"Yes ; but they say he's dipped deeply in this Bolivian business, and that it's a safe thing."

"Depend upon it, if it's hazardous, he has dipped in and come out again."

The first speaker looks gloomy. Bolivians weigh heavy upon his soul, and visions of prolonged contango vex his spirit.

Mr. Lyndhurst waits for the end of the piece, looking at the

stage, but seeing very little that goes on there, though Miss Belormond is using those fine eyes of hers for his especial advantage. When the curtain falls he goes through Lord Earlswood's privileged door to the stage, and makes his way to Myra's dressing-room.

"May I come in for a few minutes before you change your dress," he asks.

"Yes, if you will promise to stay no more than a few minutes. Badgewick, you can get me a cup of coffee," adds Myra to her attendant, who vanishes at this command.

Mrs. Brandreth is seated before her dressing-table, with its litter of lace-bordered handkerchiefs, fans, sandal-wood glove-boxes, and diamond-cut scent-bottles. There is no vulgar untidiness, only a picturesque confusion of elegant objects.

"You are looking tired," says Mr. Lyndhurst, dropping into one of the luxurious chairs. "I suppose you are rather glad your triumphs are suspended for a time."

"I am more than glad. I don't think I could have endured another night of this millwheel work."

"And yet the play is Westray's. I thought to act in a play of his was unqualified delight."

The dark hazel eyes grow hard and cold; the flexible lips tighten.

"Yes, I am pleased to act in his pieces," she answers. "We owe each other success."

"On one side, at least, the debt is large. What would he be as a dramatist if you had never given life and meaning to his work? I believe he is grateful, poor fellow! O, by the way, I saw his wife to-day."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; I called on her this morning: found her in sad trouble, poor thing! That bill of sale has been enforced; there is a bailiff in the house."

Not for her very life could Myra Brandreth, so clever in the management of her countenance on ordinary occasions, repress the gratified smile which curves her lip for an instant at this intelligence.

"So ends Westray's domestic bliss," continues Lyndhurst. "When the bailiff sneaks in at the door, Eros makes off by the window. When a man gives a bill of sale on his household goods, depend upon it domestic love, though not a recognised item, is included in the inventory."

"Is not Mrs. Westray's devotion proof against calamity? I thought her a model of conjugal fidelity—the kind of wife one reads of in old stories; a species that is almost obsolete nowadays."

"Mrs. Westray is foolishly faithful to a husband who has

grown weary of her. But I think I have given her a proof of his falsehood which will weaken her faith in him, if it does not destroy her affection for him."

"You have shown her—"

"The letter picked up in your drawing-room."

"And she believes—"

"Exactly what you and I intended she should believe."

"Don't say *I* intended," remonstrates Myra. "It was your idea, remember."

"Perhaps, in its ultimate development. But I know whose suggestion gave birth to the idea. Don't let us dispute the honour of originating the notion. It was a stroke of genius in any case, and the kind of idea that is more likely to spring from a woman's brain than from a man's."

Myra laughs uneasily, opening and closing a large white fan with a somewhat nervous movement. Lyndhurst rises from his low chair and walks up and down the room thoughtfully.

"I suppose it is what your strictly honourable people would call an ugly business," he says, after a pause; "and the worst of it is that it does not seem likely to succeed."

"How so?"

"We have made that poor creature supremely miserable, without opening the door for her release. She is not a bird to be snared so easily as you seemed to think."

"Would you have me think well of her?" asks Myra, with lowering brow and angry eyes. "I hate her too much for that. Yes, I hate her. It sounds horrible, does it not? She has never injured me, you say. Has she not? She robbed me of the only heart I ever cared to win, and should have won but for her. What does it matter to me that she was unconscious of that wrong? Her ignorance does not lessen my loss. I have never hidden my feelings from you. You are just the one man I trust, because you have never pretended to be in love with me, because you have never affected to be better than you are, or to believe in creeds you secretly despise. When Lord Earlswood brought me the news of Herman's marriage, I went down on my knees and swore that if it was in human power to compass the breaking of that bond, it should be broken; that if any act of mine could sever man and wife, they should be parted. Am I likely to be scrupulous after such an oath as that?"

"Well, no, decidedly not. That is what I most admire in you, Mrs. Brandreth. You are thorough. You have trusted me and I will confide in you. You compliment me upon being what I have always acknowledged myself—an unscrupulous man, counting the creeds and codes for which other men profess reverence, by which they pretend to rule their lives, as the convenient for-

mulæ of judicious hypocrites. The Stock Exchange has shown me no difference between the religious man and the infidel. Each is alike eager to enrich himself at the cost of his neighbour. Perhaps I should have been a better man than I am if I had found humanity in general better; if flatterers and parasites had not hung about me like the ivy that enfolds and strangles a tree, choking every good impulse; if women had been true to me, and not to my purse; if one holy or genuine feeling had come in my way. It never did. I have found friends false to the core; women mere money-worshippers, ready to sell their souls for a diamond parure or a pair of high-stepping horses. Never till I saw Mrs. Westray did I learn to admire virtue; never till that hour did I know the meaning of love—love which hopes one day and despairs the next; love which takes the taste out of life's common pleasures, and makes existence a slow fever of alternate elation and despondency. Should I refrain from following her because she has a husband she loves—a neglectful husband at best, who gives his brightest hours to the world, and favours her with the mere refuse of his days? No; I saw her unappreciated, almost forsaken, and I swore to win her. I have bided my time, patiently enough so far, but I am growing tired of delay. It has been the study of my life to get happiness out of the present. I have no future."

"Your future is just as secure as other people's, I imagine."

"Not quite. For all men life is an uncertain quantity. Preachers enlarge upon that text *ad nauseam*. But for me the uncertainty is tenfold, and a sudden ending, come when it will, inevitable. Three years ago I had occasion to consult a physician about certain uncomfortable symptoms in the region of the heart—premonitory spasms suggestive of mischief. I had not been alarmed without cause. The oracle informed me that there was organic disease. I might live five years, or even ten; but I was a doomed man. Some day, without warning, suddenly as if struck by a shell, I should drop down, and the comedy or tragedy of life would be over for Hamilton Lyndhurst. I went to another oracle, only to hear the same sentence. This knowledge has not been without its influence on my life. If I am more reckless than other men, remember that I stake less. No long future stretches out before me, no sluggish old age awaits me. I have tried to crowd a century of pleasure into a few years of dissipation; but pleasure after a little while becomes no more than a word, and, for any delight it affords, might as well be called pain. I should like to taste some purer joy before the fiat is issued. I should like to win wife and home—to die at the feet of the woman I love."

"I suppose you expect me to pity you," says Myra, half in scorn. "I think you are a man to be envied."

"Why envied?"

"Because you stand a chance of escaping old age—the after-taste of all life's sweetness, which, to my mind is more bitter than death—wrinkles, gray hairs, dull eyes, neglect, the sense that one is but a ghost among the living—dead long ago, though one does not care to tell the world so. Your tree will fall in the green, you will be spared the sere and yellow leaf."

"Perhaps you are right, but autobiography shows us that men with sound constitutions and long purses have made rather a good thing of old age, and have left the scene regretfully at the last. It is hardly a pleasant thing to sit under the Damoclesian sword, or to have the skeleton at life's feast such a prominent figure in the foreground. My life is too uncertain even for the plans that give form and purpose to the lives of other rich men. Why should I build houses or picture-galleries, plant gardens or buy deer-parks? Before the mortar is dry I may need that narrower house we are all travelling towards. No, from the time I heard the doctor's decree I have lived as much as possible in the present. The only hope I have permitted myself is the hope of winning a wife I can love and revere."

"Marry Miss Belormond. She admires you immensely, and is really one of the handsomest women in London."

A shudder is Mr. Lyndhurst's sole reply to this suggestion.

"Well, come to me to-morrow morning, and we'll talk over this infatuation of yours."

Hamilton Lyndhurst accepts this invitation for to-morrow as his dismissal for to-night, and takes his leave immediately. Miss Belormond is standing at the wing as he passes out, gorgeously arrayed as Hypolita, queen of the Amazons, in gold tissue, with a considerable display of pink silk legs and jewelled buskins, and a cataract of somebody else's hair falling over her like a mantle, the whole crowned with a glittering helmet.

She smiles benignly upon Mr. Lyndhurst as he goes by, and wonders that he does not linger for a few minutes' flirtation. She has been told that he is one of the richest men in London, and a bachelor, and she feels that for such a man she could forego her chances of dramatic renown, and content herself with the quiet simplicity of domestic life, embellished with servants in livery and a three-hundred-guinea barouche.

CHAPTER XXIX.

“Lo now, what hearts have men! they never mount
As high as woman in her selfless mood.”

EDITHA succeeds in finding a charming lodging—not at Wimbledon, but at Roehampton—a rustic-looking cottage with irreproachable geraniums in all the windows, and a good-natured maiden lady as proprietress. Here Mrs. Westray brings nurse and baby next day, carrying away from Bridge-end House only one portmanteau containing her plainest dresses, and a box for baby. She allows Selina to show the custodian box and portmanteau open, that he may see she is taking nothing that belongs to the house—no bronze, or china, or plate. Alas, the fine old massive silver from the Priory plate-chests, and all Herman’s pretty gifts collected in the two years of their married life are included in the inventory which gives a stranger dominion over Mr. Westray’s household goods! But even this fact hardly pains Editha now. What matters the shattered home now that love has deserted its empty hearth? Let all things go—memorials of happiness departed!

After the revelation of that fatal letter, Mrs. Westray has no expectation of her husband’s return in answer to her summons. His going to the scene of war has doubtless been a deeply-planned business from first to last. He knew the wreck of his home to be inevitable, and cared nothing for it, having new hopes and schemes for the future—a home in exile with his first love. The letter to Mrs. Brandreth tells that plainly enough. When he wrote that letter—on the eve of his departure most likely—he had no intention of coming back to England. With the same pen he wrote to his wife, touching lightly on his difficulties, talking hopefully of retrenchment in the future. Specious and cruel letter, meant to lull suspicion, full of promises never intended to be fulfilled.

Broken-hearted, desolate beyond all measure, Editha retires to the peaceful shelter of the Roehampton lodging, feeling even in her misery that there is an infinite relief in getting quite away from that dreadful bailiff. Baby, with infinite love of novelty, is pleased with the change in his surroundings, and takes kindly to the solitary maiden of the cottage. The rooms are airy and exquisitely clean, with that absolute purity which is oftenest to be found in a very small house, where the searching eye of the mistress espies every grain of dust or lurking cobweb, every cloud upon the window-panes or infinitesimal morsel of flue hovering in the folds of the drapery. Jane the nursemaid, a

girl of less philosophic temper than Selina, is glad to escape from Bridge-end House.

"It seemed as if there was a cloud hanging over the house after that man come in, mem," she remarks, as she attends upon her mistress and Master George at tea; "master away and all, too. It's all very well for Selina to take it so easy; but I never lived where there was anything of that kind, and I found it prey upon my spirits. I'm sure the way that old gentleman used his knife was enough to spoil any one's appetite for their dinner. Such a greedy way with him, too. He told us he was a pig for Irish stew, and I'm sure he carried out the observation."

Editha has been three days in this new abode—very quiet days. She has written home telling Ruth that she has taken a lodging at Roehampton for a week or two, because the air is better for baby. Not a word has she said about the bill of sale or Herman's perfidy. Let the tragedy of her life play itself to the end. Her lips and her pen will be slow to tell her husband's dishonour. There has been no letter from Herman to his wife during this time. The *Day Star* gives a long letter daily. Bright, graphic as ever is the betrayer's pen. The fatal second of September has come and gone. The battle of Sedan has been fought, and Napoleon has laid down his sword. Herman is at the scene of action, and his pen depicts that disastrous conflict, the bloody field, the gloomy resignation of the fallen emperor—the stamp of death already on that thoughtful brow—the awful despair of the fatalist whom Fate has beaten.

Editha reads those animated descriptions with a feeling of horror. He can write so vividly, he can be so fully master of his intellect at the very moment his heart is full of treachery, his mind plotting deceit! Is this the man she has loved and thought noblest among mankind—brave, frank, honourable, true?

The *Day Star* gives a few lines to the closing of the Frivolity Theatre:

"Mrs. Brandreth's *bijou* house will re-open in October, with a new comedy from the pen of Mr. Westray, whose genius is allied with the fortunes of this charming theatre."

"She is free now," thinks Editha, "free to follow her old lover. I ought to have understood the story of Herman's life when I saw *Kismet*."

About five o'clock on the third afternoon of Mrs. Westray's residence at Roehampton Selina arrives, flushed and warm, after her walk up the hilly lane which leads from the Richmond road to this secluded village on the edge of the heath. Selina wears her Sunday clothes, the last fashionable thing in black silk jackets, a good deal of hay-coloured horsehair at the back of her head, and a Parisian bonnet at half a guinea from the Brompton-road.

"O, if you please, mum," she begins, "I thought I'd better step up with it, as it might be of consequence. It came when I was a-cleaning of myself, and I didn't lose a hinstant putting on my hout-door things before I started to bring it."

Mysterious address, in which the all-important noun is represented by an unidead pronoun.

"Bring what, Selina?" asks Editha, while the girl searches in a pocket, which is a whole breadth behind the convenient position for pockets, and obliges Selina to twist her fingers round in an uncomfortable way and make an animated corkscrew of herself as she dives into it.

"Is it a letter?"

"No, mum, a telegraph from foreign parts."

"From my husband!" cries Editha. Her face flushes, her heart beats. He has not forgotten her altogether, even yet. He has something important to tell. Is it the bold revealment of his guilt, or is he repentant? Is the telegram to announce his return to home and loyalty?

"O, do be quick, Selina," she cries piteously, and at last Selina extracts the document from a pocket which is absolutely choked with a handkerchief, a pair of gloves,—which Selina, finding the atmosphere oppressive, has taken off during her walk,—a couple of green apples, a memorandum-book, a slate-pencil, the door key, a needle-case, and her mother's last letter.

The telegram is from Ostend.

"Come at once. I have been taken seriously ill on my way home, and am laid up at the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs. The boat leaves Dover for Ostend at ten P.M. Do not delay."

"Delay!" exclaims Editha; "as if I should waste an instant. My dearest one ill and among strangers. Thank God that his first impulse was to send for me."

Forgotten for the moment his treachery, his guilt. Her only thought is how she can fly fastest to his side. Unhappily there is but one pace for the careless traveller indifferent as to waste of time, and the eager lover flying to his mistress, or the fraudulent bankrupt flying from his creditors. The Dover mail leaves at a given hour, the night has but one boat for Ostend. Editha hurries a few things into her portmanteau; divides her small stock of money with the nurse; gives a hundred instructions about baby's welfare during her absence; kisses and cries over that young gentleman for five minutes or so; spends another five minutes on her knees in the little white-curtained bedchamber, imploring Heaven's protection for her child, and then drives away in a fly, with the faithful Selina for an escort as far as the railway-station.

Ill, seriously ill, says the telegram. Dying, perhaps. The wife's lips move in silent prayer as the fly jolts and jingles

onward upon its journey from suburb to city. Ill, in danger, perhaps! But surely Death will spare him. Heaven will give him back to her, made whole in mind and in body, repentant of intended falsehood, snatched back from sin's fatal gulf by kindly sickness. What better school for self-examination and repentance than the quiet of a sick-bed? She hastens to him—thankful for the summons which calls her to his side—fearful but not hopeless.

CHAPTER XXX.

Iachimo. With five times so much conversation, I should get ground of your fair mistress, make her go back, even to the yielding, had I admittance and opportunity to friend.

Posthumus. No, no.

Iachimo. I dare thereupon pawn the moiety of my estate to your ring; which, in my opinion, overvalues it something: but I make my wager rather against your confidence than her reputation: and, to bar your offence herein too, I durst attempt it against any lady in the world.

Posthumus. You are a great deal abused in too bold a persuasion; and I doubt not you sustain what you're worthy of by your attempt.

Iachimo. What's that?

Posthumus. A repulse: though your attempt, as you call it, deserve more; a punishment too.

BIG raindrops begin to fall as the Dover mail leaves murky London behind and pierces into the heart of the fair Kentish landscape—past homely farmhouses, and orchards where the branches of the apple-trees are bending under their burden of fruit, crimson and amber, green and russet; past Gothic villas, with their trim new gardens, geometrical flower-beds, year-old gooseberry-bushes, and peach-trees stretched upon the new red walls like the fingers of a skeleton hand; past hop-fields, where the vines are climbing to the tops of the poles, and stretching out green tendrils to their neighbours as in friendly greeting; past broad fields of tawny wheat still waiting the sickle, and vast plains of stubble whence the barley has been carried; and so to the chalky cliffs, and the old Roman stronghold standing darkly out against a stormy sky, where a young moon rides like a labouring vessel in a sea of clouds.

The night is rainy and blustering; and Editha, travelling for the first time alone, follows the railway porter along the slippery pier, and knows not into what bottomless pit she may be descending, as she gropes her way down to the Ostend boat. Travellers dash about wildly in the darkness; every one acts as if his voyage were a matter of life and death, his portmanteau stuffed with specie or uncut diamonds, so fearful does he seem lest that treasure should be reft from him. Pushed and buffeted by her

neighbours, Editha reaches the wet deck somehow, and pauses there bewildered by the ferocious snorting of the engine, which seems to be remonstrating savagely against enforced inaction. The rain drives her down to the ladies' cabin. Who knows not that awful scene, that modern embodiment of the Black Hole at Calcutta?—an airless cupboard, with cushioned shelves, on which bundles of limp humanity lie helpless, motionless, their heads tied up in pocket-handkerchiefs, perhaps, like victims about to be offered on the altar of Poseidon, who is already flapping against the sides of the vessel with prophetic threatenings. One prostrate female lies on the floor. The steward—a permitted intruder, like the dusky guardian of a seraglio—distributes basins methodically and unblushingly, cheerfully even, as if they were crockery pools dealt out to the players in some round game.

From this hideous scene Mrs. Westray recoils horror-stricken, and reascends to the deck. The steamer is plunging in a wretchedly head-foremost fashion through the waves. Dover's lamplit crescent recedes, the castle bobs up and down among the clouds above the hill. The steamer gives a lurch, and makes as if it would turn head over heels, then reels frantically sideways like a shying horse. Shiny men in oilskin coats and sou'-westers stagger up and down the deck. No woman's form relieves the dismal scene, and Editha feels that conventionality compels her to return to that hideous den below. She goes down again, finds a corner to sit in—room to lie down there is none—and tries to lose her sense of the surrounding horror in sleep.

Sleep while Herman awaits her—ill, perhaps dying! That were indeed impossible. She shuts her eyes and thinks of him, prays for him, prays for her darling boy at Roehampton, separated for the first time from his mother. She prays while her fellow-passengers groan and perform a concerted piece upon the theme of sea-sickness.

Dawn, bleak, gray, and ghastly, a dismal struggle betwixt light and darkness, and the vessel, rolling, pitching, creaking, grumbling, blundering, grinds against the landing-stage at Ostend. Every one rushes frantically to the gangway or struggles vindictively for luggage; touts, porters, and custom-house officials clamour hoarsely in the dim light. A dreary stretch of quay; white houses glimmering faintly in the distance, dingier buildings looming dark in the fore-ground; a slate-coloured sea heaving and surging in the back-ground; of these things Editha is dimly conscious, as she contrives to distinguish her portmanteau from the mass of luggage, and to get it conveyed to the custom-house. Here a weary interval: portmanteaus laid out on a long counter like bodies awaiting dissection; travellers delivering up their keys; hotel-touts lauding their several establishments on

every side ; Flemish, indifferent French, broken English—Babel on a small scale.

“Hôtel des Ambassadeurs, family hotel—baths—table-d’hôte—English spoken—all that there is of most comfortable,” says a man at Mrs. Westray’s side, trying to possess himself of her travelling-bag.

“Yes ; that is the hotel I want to go to,” she replies eagerly. “Is it near ?”

“But yes, madame, it is all near. But you will have a carriage for the luggage,” he adds persuasively, the hotel in question being nearly a mile off. “Will madame have the goodness to indicate to me her packets ?”

Editha points out her solitary portmanteau, and gives the man the key thereof. By the exercise of some occult influence upon the custom-house officer he gets the portmanteau opened, glanced into, locked, and handed over to him with expedition, and leads the way out on the quay, where he hands Mrs. Westray into a dilapidated vehicle drawn by two gray horses about the size of one English horse cut in two, and of less than one-horse-power. The commissionaire mounts the box, the starveling horses shamble away from the custom-house over the stoniest road Editha has ever travelled, the stunted coach jingles through the sleeping town of Ostend—not the gayest of towns even in its waking hours, and by this half light a street of tombs, yawning *portecochères* leading to family vaults, a shabby church or two, and a noble expanse of paving-stones.

On goes the joggling equipage, the small gray horses tugging desperately as if they were dragging Cleopatra’s Needle, past the town and to the more aristocratic portion of Ostend facing the digue. Here the vehicle shoots off at a tangent, the driver screaming vociferously and houplà-ing to an alarming extent, and suddenly twists into the courtyard of a big white hotel. Huge black letters along the façade of the mansion proclaim it to be l’Hôtel des Ambassadeurs.

A half-awakened waiter stands in the doorway, waiting for any victims from the Dover boat, and plucks up a little animation on seeing Editha alight from her coach-and-pair. Night is still at odds with morning ; everything has a dim and dismal look. The hall and windows of the hotel are dark and shadowy, redolent of yesterday’s table-d’hôte.

“Is Mr. Westray here ?” Editha asks eagerly.

“An English monsieur ? Yes.”

“Is he better ?” she asks. And as the man stares at her stupidly and is dumb, she adds impatiently, “Take me to his room this moment, please. You can pay the coachman afterwards. I am Mrs. Westray.”

"But certainly, madame. It is on the second floor. This way, madame; take the trouble to ascend that step."

The man leads the way up a broad shallow staircase, shining and slippery, along a corridor on which innumerable doors open, up another flight of stairs, past a landing where two plaster nymphs admire themselves in a large mirror, into another corridor, where he selects a door at which to knock.

"Entrez," says a voice within. Not Herman's voice assuredly. No sick man's voice was ever so deep and full. The doctor's, perhaps.

Mrs. Westray enters, and the waiter runs down-stairs to pay the driver of that nondescript vehicle with the ragged gray horses.

She finds herself in a large sitting-room, furnished in the usual fashion; flowered-tapestry curtains; amber damask-covered chairs and sofas, which look as if they were meant for anything rather than repose; a centre table, with an impracticable ink-stand; gilded vases of artificial roses on the velvet-covered mantel-piece; gilded clock, marking just the remotest hour of the twelve. A lamp burns dimly on a side-table; one uncurtained window, left ajar, looks out on the dull gray sea. The waves roar monotonously in the distance; a pale-yellow light glimmers on the horizon.

The room is empty, but an open door communicates with an inner room. The sick man's chamber, no doubt. Editha hurries towards this door, but before she can cross the room a man comes out of that inner chamber—Hamilton Lyndhurst. He is very pale, and has a haggard look in his eyes as of one who has outwatched the night.

"You here," she cries, with a look of aversion, "with my husband!"

"Here, dear Mrs. Westray, but not with your husband," he answers, going to the outer door. He has locked it and put the key in his pocket, while Editha stands in the middle of the room looking about her in sheer bewilderment.

"Where is Herman?" she cries distractedly; and then seeing what he has done, she asks with sudden horror, "Why do you lock that door?"

"To the best of my belief, Mr. Westray is with the belligerents in the vicinity of Sedan. Why have I locked that door, Editha? Only because I would be heard by you patiently till I have told all my story. You might refuse to hear the end if I did not put some constraint on you. On my honour as a gentleman there is no shadow of disrespect in the action. Alone in a desert island my reverence for you would triumph over every meaner feeling. The task I have set myself is to win you, Editha; to touch your heart, to convince your understanding, to prove to you that love such as mine is not lightly to be scorned. Forgive me if I begin with a stratagem."

"Your honour," she echoes, as if she had heard only the beginning of his speech, "your honour as a gentleman! It is blasphemy against the name of gentleman for you to make such an appeal. It was you, then, who sent me this lying message telling me that my husband was dangerously ill? Thank God, that is not true; thank God, even though I have been duped and fooled by your treachery. And now, sir, open that door, and let me leave this house. The next boat will take me back to England."

She takes a hurried survey of the walls, looking for a bell which she may ring, summoning the servants of the house. In a large hotel, full of people, she cannot be long in the power of this traitor. There is no bell to be seen.

Lyndhurst interprets that eager look.

"Do not trouble yourself about the bell," he says; "it has been removed."

"Will you unlock that door?" she asks again desperately.

"Not till you have listened to me, Editha; not till you have heard me plead my cause. You could dismiss me contemptuously from your own house. There you were all-powerful. You did not spare me. Love, even the guiltiest, should claim a noble-minded woman's pity. You were without compassion for my love, which, I declare to you, is not altogether an unholy passion. It was strong enough to outlive your scorn, humble enough to pardon insult, steadfast enough to persevere in the face of rejection. You are my prisoner, Editha. Call me treacherous, if you like—brutal, if you like. You must and shall stay with me till you have heard all that a man who loves as I do can urge in extenuation of the wrong inseparable from love that comes too late."

"I will not hear you," she answers, calmer in this hour of peril than he had thought to find her. "You are talking to the winds when you talk to me. Can you not understand that there may be such a woman in the world as a wife who loves her husband and fears her God? Has your experience of life been so infamous, that you believe that a few specious speeches can turn a wife from her fidelity to the husband of her choice? Were I the most miserable creature that ever unhappy fate linked to a man she despised, you could not think worse of me than you do, when you suppose that any baseness of yours, any snare you may set for me, will prevail over faithful and honest love."

"Faithful to a man who is weary of you—faithful to a man who never really loved you! Faithful in the face of that letter which I gave you the other day—that letter with its boldly-avowed infidelity! No, Editha; I do not suppose you weak-minded enough for such slavish adherence to a violated tie, when love, real and perfect love, is at your feet. Consider, dearest, between what different destinies your choice lies. With Westray,

neglect, abandonment, the humiliating pity which the world bestows on a slighted wife, poverty, a ruined home; with me, love unbounded, wealth without limit, all that this world we live in offers of the brightest and best—”

“And dishonour—the consciousness of being the vilest among women!” says Editha, interrupting him. “You are wasting your eloquence, Mr. Lyndhurst. Your knowledge of my sex may be profound, but you have mistaken the temper of the woman you have tried to ensnare. Open that door and let me pass. Were we to argue for an hour, the result would be the same. Your pretended love inspires no feeling in my mind but loathing. My contempt is so great that I do not even fear you.”

The brave clear eyes looked at him boldly, bright with invincible scorn.

“Do you not fear me?” cries Hamilton Lyndhurst passionately. “Beware how you boast. Do you think when I lured you here I had not made up my mind to win you? Ah, my beloved, you do not know what love is in a man who stakes all upon one cast. Yes, I am a traitor; granted—a traitor and no gentleman. I staked my honour against so high a prize, that, let me but win the game, and I am happy in dishonour. I can afford even that you should hate me for a little while, Editha, for in the end you will learn to love me. Love such as mine must prevail. Do not provoke me to desperation. Consider what kind of man I am before you pay devotion with contempt. For this world’s opinion I care nothing. I fear nothing beyond or above this world. I am told that I have not very long to live. I am warned that if I would taste the sweetness of life, I must win my earthly Elysium quickly. I am no Ulysses, to be beaten and buffeted about the world for a score of years, and find home and wife at the last. Now—now while the last glow of youth still warms my heart—now I must be blessed. Do you think I am a man to let go my prize, having sworn to win it?”

“I think you are a villain and a coward, and that God is above us both,” answers Editha unflinchingly, “and I repeat that I do not fear you.”

“Fear the world’s malice if you defy me,” says Lyndhurst in a sibilant whisper, such as woman’s first tempter may have breathed into the ear of Eve. “Fear your lost good name, your husband’s contempt—fear to face the society whose laws you outraged when you came to meet me here. Tell the world your story, and see how readily you will be believed. The world believes only the worst. Appear before the world injured, a dupe, a sufferer, faithful in calamity, and see what tender treatment you will have of its charity. Without my protection, without my love, you are a ruined woman. As my wife, wealth and power will be

yours. Your innocent soul cannot reckon the master-sway wealth holds over the meanness of mankind."

For the first time since she has entered the snare Hamilton Lyndhurst sees his victim tremble. But it is indignation and not fear which makes her frame quiver as she draws herself to her fullest height, sternly confronting him.

"Once for all, will you open that door?" she asks.

"Not till we have come to terms—not till you have given me a promise that shall bind your fate with mine from this day. You will leave this room on my arm, in the face of society, compromised as Mrs. Westray, pledged to be my wife so soon as the law can undo one knot and tie another."

Her breath comes faster. She looks at him desperately, like a hunted fawn round which the dogs are closing in a deadly circle.

"You mean it—you swear that you will not let me go?"

"Not till I have your promise."

"And if I cry aloud for help—call the people of the house?"

"Do you think I would let you be heard? Except the man who admitted you just now, there is not a creature astir in the house, and I daresay he has crept back to his hole to snatch a last half-hour's sleep. No, Editha; I am master of the situation, and I am resolved to use my power to the uttermost."

"Then God help and pardon me in my extremity!" she cries, with clasped hands and eyes uplifted, and with one wild rush flies to the window which stands ajar, the long casement window opening on a frail balcony.

Her hand is on the latch; another moment, and she will have thrown herself over that shallow balcony to certain death. Quick as Lyndhurst is, he is not a breath too soon. He grasps her arm, and drags her back into the room.

"Great God," he cries in a choking voice, "she is mad!" and holds her for an instant motionless, powerless in his agonised clutch.

Suddenly, as she looks at him half in terror, half in anger, his face changes, with an awful mysterious transformation she has never seen before in the human countenance, haply may never see again. He gives one faint choking cry, tears at his breast with convulsive hand for a moment, and then falls like a stone figure overturned at its base—falls with a shock that makes the room tremble, and lies at her feet, still as clay.

Her shriek rends the air. All the passion and terror of the last half-hour finds relief in that wild cry. Not once, but again and again she screams, with frantic appeal for help from man or Heaven; but the figure stretched at her feet, face downwards, does not stir.

Involuntarily she looks round again for the bell that is not there. Needless the bell now, for her cries have been heard.

There is a hurrying of feet in the corridor, a vigorous hand tries to open the door vainly. Voices are heard consulting hastily; a few moments' delay, and the key is in the lock, the door opens, and foremost among an eager little group enters Herman Westray.

Those piercing shrieks have brought him—a wakeful sojourner in a room half a dozen doors off—to the help of a stranger.

It is something more than a common surprise to find that the wild appeal for succour came from his wife. Stranger, more awful is it, to see that prostrate figure with hidden face.

“Editha!”

She flings herself upon his breast, sobbing hysterically.

“O, thank God, thank God!” she cries. “I knew He would not abandon me in my peril.”

“Editha, in Heaven's name what brings you here?” asks her husband, stupid with amazement. He has been roused from an uneasy morning sleep by those awful screams of hers, has hurriedly huddled on his clothes, half-awakened, and is not in a condition for grasping the meaning of things quickly.

“I'll tell you by-and-by,” she sobs. “Will some one,” looking round at the agitated group in the doorway, “see to him?”

She points, with a look of loathing, to the fallen figure.

The bystanders hurry forward and kneel down beside it, and try to raise the massive shoulders, heavy as marble.

“Who is that man?” cries Herman.

“Your friend, Mr. Lyndhurst.”

“Editha!” he exclaims, looking at her with unutterable horror. Of all names that could be spoken at such a moment, there is none more ominous to Herman Westray's ear than this.

“Yes, he fell down in a fit just now. Had they not better fetch a doctor?”

“Let him die where he fell!” cries Herman, beside himself. “How did you come to this place? Why do I find you with that man?”

He is reckless who hears him. Happily there are no English listeners; but the fact is indifferent to him in his passion. No sense of prudence restrains him—no consideration for his wife's reputation ties his tongue.

“What brought you here?” he gasps.

“I came in answer to a telegram from you, telling me that you were here, dangerously ill—telling me to lose no time.”

“I sent no such telegram. Show me the message.”

She feels for it in her pocket. Even in her confusion she remembers putting that telegram in her pocket after reading it for about the twentieth time on board the steamer, by the dim light of the cabin lamp. It is not to be found. She must have dragged it out with her handkerchief, and dropped it perhaps in that wretched hackney-coach which brought her to the hotel.

"I have lost it ; but it does not matter."

"Not in the least," answers Herman in a curious tone ; and at this moment the attention of husband and wife is called from their own affairs to that prostrate figure round which the hotel people are gathered. They have raised it from the ground, and the awful face looks up at them, the eyes fixed and open, staring horribly as in some sudden terror. Gray and dull is that stony face ; heavily hang those limbs, as they lift up the figure that was once Hamilton Lyndhurst, and lay it on the amber-covered sofa. They fall back when their work is done, in a shuddering group, murmuring compassionately,

"Le pauvre homme—un si belle homme—mort comme ça, si subitement ; un vrai coup de foudre ; mais c'est effrayant." And then some one cries,

"Mais cours donc, Georges ; va trouver un médecin."

Little need of a doctor to affirm the appalling fact. The arrest has come. The sentence has been pronounced. The selfish sensual soul, which has never known an aspiration beyond earthly happiness, has gone to its account.

"Come away, Editha," Herman says sternly ; "come away from this revolting scene." And then he says in a whisper, close to her ear, as they leave the room together, "Your lover has not enjoyed his triumph long. Retribution has trodden on the heels of guilt a little closer than usual."

She looks at him in blank amazement. Can he doubt her? Can any evidence shake his faith in her purity?

She has believed him guilty on the testimony of his own handwriting, but she is not the less wonder-stricken to find he can suspect her. And yet her presence here with that dead man is circumstantial evidence strong enough to blast the reputation of a modern Lucretia.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"If you have tears prepare to shed them now."

LORD EARLSWOOD, bored to death in a Norwegian pine-forest, is recalled suddenly to the boredom of civilisation by a telegram brought by a mounted messenger from Christiana, a messenger who has been two days finding his lordship.

"Bless my soul!" exclaims Lord Earlswood before opening the missive, "is it to say the Frivolity is burnt down, I wonder? Theatres generally are burnt down in the long-run. Carpenters will indulge in a foolish preference for lighting their pipes in a hurry, and throwing unextinguished lucifer matches among their shavings. Good for the building interest! Haw!"

Thus to his faithful companion, Captain Shlooker, late of the Fusiliers.

"Hope it isn't the theatre," says Shlooker sympathetically. "Jolly little box. Nicest house in London. Splendid woman, Mrs. Brandreth."

"Don't say that again," exclaims his lordship irritably, "it's not original. You've made the same remark half a dozen times a day for the last fortnight."

"Well, there isn't much to talk about in a Norwegian hut. No morning papers, no club, no corner. And you're not a great hand at starting subjects."

"I expect to be talked to," replies Earlswood grandly.

"As to remarking that Mrs. Brandreth is a sple—well, I won't say it again, that is only a spontaneous burst of feeling on my part. I admire her immensely."

"Bother your admiration! I don't believe you'd stand a box of Jouvin's gloves to save her from starvation."

"Hadn't you better read your telegram, and see if the Frivolity is burnt down?" inquires the Captain blandly.

His lordship thus reminded, hitches a glass into his eye, and peruses the document in question.

It tells him nothing about the Frivolity Theatre. The message is from the housekeeper at Redhill Park, telling him that Lady Earlswood is dangerously ill, and urging his immediate return.

The message has been sent out from the head office three days ago—at least three days more must elapse before he can reach England. His presence at that sick bed can be of little use, can afford small solace, he thinks, for her ladyship and he have been at daggers drawn throughout the seven years of their wedded life, having a different way of thinking upon every subject. But he is quite ready to obey the summons; and he and Captain Shlooker concentrate their somewhat limited intellects into one focus, and apply themselves to the task of getting back to England as soon as possible.

They have an arsenal of guns, a small cartload of fishing-rods and tackle, a few hundredweight of tinned provisions and other stores to dispose of, to say nothing of their portable dwelling-house, portable boats, and other gear. These they leave to be packed and shipped by guides and servants, two of which incumbrances Lord Earlswood has brought in his train. Then, unattended save by his faithful shadow, Captain Shlooker, Lord Earlswood starts for England.

He disembarks from the Norwegian steamer at Hull, within four days of his receipt of the telegram from Redhill Park, just in time to catch the London express, without stopping to have so much as a "brandy-and-soda," as Captain Shlooker remarks

pathetically on the platform, his easy-loving soul disapproving this uncomfortable haste.

"What's the use of being in such a hurry, Earlswood?" he remonstrates; "we might just as well have stopped for a Turkish bath and a bit of dinner, and gone up by the mail. I feel as if I'd been living up a chimney. You can't do any good at Redhill."

"I know that," answers the imperturbable nobleman; "but I've been sent for, and it's only civil to go. I should like to shake hands with Elfrida before she dies."

Lady Earlswood is the fifth daughter of the Earl of Mercia, an intensely Saxon nobleman, who has chosen his children's names from the chronicles of the Heptarchy.

"How do you know she's going to die?" asks the Captain discontentedly. It is hard lines for a healthy young parasite to be deprived of those comforts and luxuries which are the sole recompense of his labours. "I daresay it's only a whim sending for you in this way, and we might just as well have stopped and had another go at the salmon."

"I'll tell you what it is, Shlooker," replies Lord Earlswood sternly. "If you don't want to go to London, you can stay where you are. I can exist without you. We shall have to part company at the Great Northern terminus, in any case. You can't go to Redhill with me, you know."

"Of course not; but I'm coming to London with you, anyhow. A fellow must grumble a little now and then, and that steamer was such a beastly hole."

"As for Lady Earlswood sending for me out of caprice," pursues his lordship presently, when they are comfortably seated in a *coupé*, puffing away at their patagas as they fly over the level shores of Humber, "that's not likely. In the first place she's a strong-minded woman; and in the second, she hates me like poison."

"A little wrong here?" interrogates the Captain, tapping his forehead.

"Not the least in the world. Awfully sensible woman, but disgustingly religious—Low, you know; walked out of church if she saw a fellow go up the pulpit stairs in his surplice; always psalm-singing; played hymn tunes on a harmonium all Sunday evening when she wasn't in church, and played 'em dooced bad into the bargain—more bellows than toon, you know; went in for district-visiting, and used to go and sing hymns over the patients in the infirmary. I never sat down to dinner with her without being afraid of smallpox, or measles, or something revolting of that kind. Then she called everything sinful, except howling and district-visiting. She was always sitting in judgment on me, and prophesying that Providence would take it out of me in some fearful way for keeping race-horses. Used to

wonder I could go to the City and Suburban without fearing I should be struck dead. Heard that I'd been seen at the Alhambra, and asked me if I didn't expect a judgment. 'No,' says I, 'I'm not concerned in any chancery proceedings;' and then she shows me the whites of her eyes, and talks about my profanity. Now a fellow does not get married for that kind of thing, you know."

"Certainly not; uncommon hard upon a fellow; regular sell," assents the Captain, sympathetically.

"Lord Mercia was a heavy swell of the old school," says his lordship, inclining to confidence. "No end of ancestry, but very little money; left a widower with eleven children, eight of them daughters; let his house in Grosvenor-square furnished, spent most of his time in chambers in the Albany, while his eight daughters—all with Saxon names, and all sandy-haired—vegetated at his castle in the north. The match was my mother's doing; she thought Elfrida's piety would keep me in the right path. But one may have too much of a good thing, you know. If she'd drawn it a little milder, I could have borne it; but Sam Weller's deputy Shepherd was a fool to her in the matter of preaching, and she hasn't his humanising leaning towards pine-apple-rum-and-water."

Captain Shlooker considers his patron deserving of infinite pity.

After this the conversation drifts towards horse-racing, and the two gentlemen discuss the probabilities as to the Doncaster Cup and Leger. They part company at the terminus, the Captain sympathetic and depressed, not quite seeing how he is to dispose of himself during the dull season, now that the Norwegian trip is "off."

The September day is drawing to a close as Lord Earlswood drives in an open fly from the station to Redhill Park, that patrimonial estate of his of which, during the last six years, he has seen very little. The sun is setting redly behind a distant clump of beeches as the fly enters the park by a gate opening into a lane that leads to the station. The lodge-keeper's little girl, in a lavender-cotton pinafore, runs out to open the gate; and it does not occur to Lord Earlswood to interrogate this child upon the state of the lady up at the great house yonder—a square and formal building with a Corinthian colonnade and portico. The glow of the sunset shines on those straight rows of windows, and the same crimson glory is reflected on the placid surface of the oblong lake at the bottom of a broad flight of stone steps which descends from the terrace before the mansion. A handsome house, doubtless, but a vast and stately dwelling-place which would need much domestic love, or a world of pleasant company to keep it warm. Lord Earlswood has found it too large for domestic felicity, too small for matrimonial concord.

The blinds are not drawn down. All is well with her ladyship,

he thinks, as the fly drives under the lofty portico, never designed for the shelter of so plebeian a vehicle.

The hall door is open, and he sees the black and white marble paving, the stone staircase with its double flight, the chilly bronze banisters; for sole ornament two green tubs, containing blossomless, fruitless orange-trees, which stand like dusky guardians on either side of the portal; altogether as cheerful as an ice-house. The grumbling wheels of the fly have made themselves heard in the eternal silence of the place, and the old butler comes out to see what convulsion of nature has disturbed the repose of the scene. He was the old butler when this present Algernon, Lord Earlswood, was a lad at Eton. Algernon has grown to manhood, and feels as if his May of life were falling into the sere and yellow leaf; but the old butler seems to him no older than in the days of his boyhood. His placid old face lights up at sight of his lord, and then grows suddenly grave.

"How do, Rogers? How is Lady Earlswood?"

Rogers shakes his head dismally.

"Too late, my lord, I'm sorry to say."

"Bless my soul, you don't mean—"

"The funeral took place yesterday, at two o'clock in the afternoon. The Honourable Edwy and the Honourable Athelstane were chief mourners."

"It must have been very sudden," says Lord Earlswood, shocked by these unexpected tidings.

He had known that his wife must be seriously ill when she allowed him to be summoned, but he had not supposed that she was on her deathbed.

"Her ladyship had been ailing for some time, my lord," replies Rogers. "She caught a cold last winter attending evening church, it being against her principles to have the horses out on Sunday, and the cold hung about her and fixed itself on her chest. I daresay if she had obeyed the doctor she might have shaken it off, but she wouldn't give up her districk-visiting."

"No," interrupts an awful voice, which echoes fearfully in the stony hall. "She lived like a martyr, and she died like one. Blessed will be her reward beyond the jasper sea."

The voice, hollow and dismal though it is, is a female voice, and proceeds from a tall square-shouldered lady in deepest mourning. She is a being composed of angles. Her elbows are square, her jaw is square, the ends of her bony fingers are as square as the finger-tips of a hard-working carpenter. She has a cold gray eye, which assumes a stony look as she gazes at Lord Earlswood.

"I—I hope her illness was not a very painful one," says his lordship, confused by this unlovely apparition. "As for her life being martyrdom, I can hardly see that. She took her own

way in everything, spent as much money as she liked, and altogether, you know, lived her own life. I can't see what more any woman can want."

"There are some women whose human hearts sigh for something more than this; there are some who desire fidelity in a husband," says the accuser, holding Lord Earlswood with her glittering eye.

"O, come, you know," says the accused, "we had better let bygones be bygones. All the world knows that Lady Earlswood and I were never suited to each other."

"The angels in heaven know a great deal more, Lord Earlswood," returns the awful female.

"Well, since I am too late to be of any use," says the wretched nobleman, who feels helpless as a fly that suddenly finds itself in the grip of a full-bodied spider, "I may as well go back to town by the next train. I'm rather used up, travelling post-haste from Norway—sea voyage, and all that kind of thing. You haven't dismissed the fly, have you, Rogers?"

"Yes, my lord; I thought you would stay the night."

"O, but hang it, you know, I've no things."

"I can telegraph to your lordship's man," suggests the butler.

"My lordship's man was left behind in Norway to pack my traps. I must get back to town to-night. I can have a carriage of some kind, I suppose," adds the master of the house, meekly.

"Of course, my lord; I'll order the brougham. The last train leaves at 9.40."

"Gracious powers!" thinks his lordship; "and it is only just eight. At the mercy of this fearful woman for an hour and forty minutes!"

This fearful woman is Miss Gregory, the late Lady Earlswood's companion and chief toady. There have been secondary toadies, in the persons of the housekeeper and my lady's own maid; but Miss Gregory—a lady of masculine education and Low Church views—has been the ruling spirit of the household. Very hard has been her rule. Rogers, the old butler, rejoices inwardly that the end has come. Lord Earlswood, having an hour and a half to dispose of, looks about him curiously. He is rather glad to see his ancestral home again, after a lapse of six years.

"It is not half a bad place," he tells himself in his modern slang, that shorthand system of English which some of his order affect. With a little taste—Myra Brandreth's taste, for instance, her fine appreciation of form and colour—the spacious orderly mansion might be made beautiful. In its present bare and formal condition it is more like the cardboard model of a house than a house where people live. Lord Earlswood goes into the drawing-room—a lofty apartment, with a superb cornice, five long windows, a marble mantelpiece by Flaxman, and nothing

else for the eye to dwell upon. The furniture is meagre and stiff, the drapery is dull and heavy; not an enlivening apartment, by any means. There stands Lady Earlswood's harmonium—that instrument which has known only hymn tunes which never in its wasted life breathed the melody of Mozart, or swelled with the mighty harmonies of Beethoven, or sung in dulcet tones the plaintive strains of Mendelssohn.

Miss Gregory follows her victim into that cheerless drawing-room; she is not going to let him off too easily. Loyalty to the dead, and an innate love of making herself unpleasant, which is a feature of Miss Gregory's character, demand that his life should be made a burden to him for the next hour and a half.

"Perhaps, Lord Earlswood, in the brief hour that you are able to spare from the giddy vortex of fashionable life, you would like to hear the particulars of my beloved patroness's last illness?" she begins with stately civility, as Lord Earlswood walks about the room and looks out of the five windows, with the air of expecting to see a different landscape from each.

"Thank you, ma'am," he says, in his blunt fashion; "I don't particularly care about hearing descriptions of illnesses. It can't do any good, you see, dwelling upon that kind of thing; and it's very painful for all parties."

"Not to me," replied Miss Gregory, removing a solitary tear from the bony bridge of her nose with a black bordered handkerchief. "I love to talk of that saintly soul; it relieves my bursting heart." And Miss Gregory breathes hard, and gives a gasp, which seems to indicate that her dress is too tight across the chest.

"She—she did not suffer much in her last illness, I hope?" says Lord Earlswood gently.

"She was buoyed up by a mind superior to mortal agony," answers Miss Gregory. "Humanly speaking, her complaint was a trying one, but her burden was lightened for her."

"I'm glad to hear it. She had doctors who understood her case, I hope?"

"She had the best that human science could afford. They understood her case well enough; but there was not one of them lofty-minded enough to understand *her*—blessed martyr!"

Lord Earlswood's patience suddenly deserts him; and he turns somewhat sharply upon Miss Gregory—so sharply that, the lady's eyes being fixed in the gaze of abstraction, he almost makes her jump.

"Perhaps, when I inform you that I consider your manner of referring to my late wife is very offensive to me, you'll be kind enough not to repeat it," he remarks sternly. "My lawyers and Lady Earlswood's lawyers know the terms of our separation; and they know that her ladyship had no cause for complaint,

either as to my liberality in monetary matters, or my willingness to make any arrangements conducive to her happiness. I don't understand being lectured in my own house by a stranger."

"A stranger to you personally perhaps, Lord Earlswood, but not a stranger to your lamented wife, or to the sorrows that wrung that trusting heart."

"We'll drop that part of the question, if you please, ma'am," interjects his lordship.

"I had the honour to be Lady Earlswood's bosom friend and confidential adviser for five blessed years," continues Miss Gregory; "I am not likely to forget her."

"I am glad to hear it. She has left you a pension, I hope?"

"She has left me five hundred pounds. Her modest way of living, her temperate habits and self-denying nature, enabled her to save money."

"Very creditable to her ladyship," replies Lord Earlswood. "The house doesn't look as if it had been kept up in a very extravagant manner," he adds, glancing round the bare-looking room with a shudder.

There are no costly trifles scattered on tables, no new books or magazines, no hothouse flowers, nothing that indicates taste or outlay.

"She was superior to the frivolities of her sex," says Miss Gregory, removing another tear. These solitary drops ooze from her eyes at regular intervals, as if by clockwork.

"I think, if you've no objection, I'll take a stroll round the place," says Lord Earlswood, looking at his watch; "and if you'll tell them to cook me a chop, I should be obliged. I've had nothing to eat since I left the steamer."

Miss Gregory bows her head in dismal assent. She rings the bell, and Rogers appears, to whom Lord Earlswood communicates his desire for a chop.

"It shall be ready in half an hour, my lord," replies Rogers briskly; and Lord Earlswood opens one of the drawing-room windows and goes out on the terrace, inwardly rejoicing at his escape from Miss Gregory. She cannot very well follow him out of doors, and he has done his best to make her understand that her conversation is uncongenial. But Miss Gregory is a person who has never tried to make herself congenial to any one. She has gone through life laying down the law, and letting worldly-minded people know her mean opinion of them.

She watches the departing nobleman as he strolls away, regretting that he has got out of her clutches.

"Ah," she sighs, "he is master here now. The children of Belial will soon take their pleasure in this house, which has been the scene of such holy work."

She breathes this lament with a recollection of prayer-meetings and missionary preachings that have been held in the spacious drawing-room. Evangelical noblemen have held forth here, to the delight of a mixed congregation, some of whom considered it a condescension in a peer to be so anxious about getting to heaven. A man of his exalted position might naturally be content with earth, and leave his future existence to take care of itself; feeling very sure, like the French Marquise of the old *régime*, that the Great Judge would think twice before condemning so august a sinner.

Lord Earlswood perambulates the stately garden, which has been maintained in perfect order, but barely and meagrely, with none of the improvements of modern horticulture. He surveys his patrimonial domain in the soft summer dusk, and thinks of the change which his wife's death has made in his life. He is a free man from to-night—free to marry Myra Brandreth.

His breath comes quickly at the thought; it is as if the gates of paradise were opened to him. His narrow soul has concentrated its affections upon this one object. So far as it is possible for a man not great in himself to love greatly, he so loves Myra. There is no selfishness in his thoughts of her. He does not consider that he will be doing her a favour by making her a peeress. He thinks of her humbly, with an almost infantine simplicity.

"Will she marry me?" he asks himself. "She is so cold—so difficult to understand. I do not even know if she cares for me. What hope or favour has she ever given me in return for my slavish devotion? She is gracious enough at times; at times barely civil. How can a fellow reckon up such a woman as that? Sometimes I think she delights in torturing me—in testing her power. But I know that all the good days of my life have been spent with her, and that I am miserable out of her company."

He circumambulates the lake, and contemplates the swans pensively. They do not approach him with any expectation of being fed, after the manner of more favoured birds. Feeding swans is one of the frivolities to which the late Lady Earlswood has been superior.

"There's that fellow Westray," pursues his lordship. "I have sometimes fancied she was fond of him; but that could hardly be, since there was nothing to prevent his marrying her instead of Miss Morcombe. And then how coolly she took the announcement of his marriage! No, there can't have been any attachment between those two, in spite of my suspicions. I believe she has flirted with him sometimes, on purpose to make me wretched. It's a way women have, when they know that a fellow would go through fire and water for them."

The result of Lord Earlswood's musings is a determination to

propose to Myra immediately. There must be no suspense now that he is a free man. He must know his fate at once. They can be married quietly two or three months hence, and travel for the first year or so, before they blaze out upon society. What a peeress she will make—she who has queened it so well before the eyes of men in her mimic world! How she will beautify yonder Palladian abode! how she will adorn that fine house in Grosvenor-place, which has been let furnished during the greater part of his lordship's married life!

He sees the future before him, radiant with domestic joy, and sees himself the proud and adoring husband of that woman who, in his eyes, is the incarnation of all that is enchanting in woman-kind. She shines apart, distant from her sisters as a star.

He goes back to the house in about half an hour, takes his modest dinner in the vast gloomy dining-room; and then, having still a quarter of an hour to spare, perambulates the mansion with Rogers, whom he keeps with him as a buffer, in case of any further attack from Miss Gregory.

"Dreadful person that woman in black," he says. "When is she going away, Rogers?"

"I can't say, my lord. Her boxes is not packed, though Mrs. Meaves, the housekeeper, gave her a hint yesterday, letting drop something to the effect of not supposing as she'd stay after the funeral. Perhaps if your lordship—"

"No," cries his lordship energetically, "I'll have no more to say to her. She may stay here for another month if she likes, but I won't enter into any discussion with her. You may write me word when she clears out."

"Yes, my lord. I hope, my lord," adds Rogers, clearing his throat, "that your lordship may be thinking of occupying Red-hill yourself before long."

"It's not unlikely, Rogers. But I should make considerable alterations and improvements before I came to live here. The place has a dreary look, to my eye."

"Begging your pardon, my lord, but things have been kept up in rather a dreary manner. Miss Gregory has had the ordering of almost everything in the household, and she's very near."

"She looks it," says Lord Earlswood. "Well, Rogers, things will be different when I come to live here."

"Yes, my lord, thank Heavings! We shall all look forward to the change."

"In the mean time matters will go on quietly. The house-keeper can write to me for cheques as she wants them. You can tell the head-gardener that I should like to see the flower-beds looking a little gayer when I come here again. *Caleolaria* and things, you know—plenty of yellows and reds; and some of

those variegated leafy things one sees at South Kensington—look rather like mixed pickles, you know.”

“Yes, my lord. Her ladyship was against spending money on the garden, and Mr. M’Clacharty was obliged to manage the best way he could. He was hard pushed, poor man, to keep his cuttings alive through the frosty weather. Miss Gregory said it was a sin to burn coals for greenhouses, when so many human beings were perishing from cold.”

“Did she give coals to the human beings?” asks his lordship.

“Well, no, my lord, not out of her own pocket! and she set her face against my lady providing for the bodily wants of the poor, when their souls required so much looking after.”

“I see,” replies Lord Earlswood. “That kind of charity never goes beyond people’s souls. The benevolence that deals in beef and bread is a vulgar virtue compared with it.”

The brougham is ready by this time, and Lord Earlswood drives away, Miss Gregory surveying his departure from her chamber-window, as Elaine watched Lancelot. And his lordship hears the stealthy raising of the sash, and knows that Miss Gregory is watching him; and Miss Gregory, quick in divination, although not moved thereto by so tender a passion as Elaine’s, knows that his lordship knows that she knows that he knows—

No, no one less than the Laureate or Lord Dundreary can manage that kind of thing.

Enough that Lord Earlswood steps into his brougham without looking up at the fair watcher, and

“This was the one discourtesy that he used.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

“Out on thee! Seeming! I will write against it;

You seem to me as Dian in her orb,
As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown.

* * * * *

How comes it now, my husband, O, how comes it,
That thou art thus estranged from thyself?
Thyself, I call it, being strange to me,
That, undividable, incorporate,
Am better than thy dear self’s better part.”

THE authorities of Ostend take the stranger’s clay, as it were, into custody, and do all that is needful to be done after so sudden and awful an end of a life not without social importance, the authorities being speedily made acquainted with the fact that the late Hamilton Lyndhurst has been an English financier of great wealth, and a person who has done them honour by dying in their town. If he shall furthermore consent—by his heirs, executors, and assigns—to be buried in Belgian soil, he will be conferring a still greater obligation on that free country.

There seems to be no one nearly interested in him who had so many flatterers and followers, so few friends. The flatterers and followers wait on the tip-toe of expectation for the particulars of their patron's will, but they do not rush over to Ostend to lavish their affection on that clay they have so worshipped and caressed while it had breath and motion. He lies alone in the large cheerless room at the hotel, and there is not so much as a dog that loved him living to wail at the door of the dead. He has come over to Ostend unattended. His valet and his lawyer are the only two people who come to take possession of his remains.

The lawyer's first idea is to carry his departed client back to England and bury him there, as an expensive and gentlemanlike proceeding, appropriate to the late Mr. Lyndhurst's position in the money market; but upon opening Mr. Lyndhurst's will, he finds that his client has especially forbidden this dreary homage to his clay.

"Let there be no religious ceremonial, or as little as possible, at my burial," he says, almost in the words of his favourite poet, Heinrich Heine, "and let me be buried in the place where I die. Let no costly cenotaph record my empty existence, or publish its lying tribute to virtues I have neither possessed nor pretended. If I must have a tombstone, let it be a plain slab of granite, large and massive, inscribed with my name and the dates of my birth and death. That is all the history my barren life affords."

Then comes the disposition of his property. Bitter, bitter news for those eager flatterers and followers—the jesters, the dancers, the flute-players, his *roués*, as Philip of Orleans called his friends, honouring them, or affecting to honour them, with the belief that they would have suffered themselves to be broken on the wheel for him. But the Parisians, says Soulaire, took it another way, and said these fine gentlemen were "*véritables espèces, des gens dignes d'être roués.*"

After a decent provision for all his servants who shall have lived with him three years at the time of his decease, Hamilton Lyndhurst leaves his estate, real and personal, pictures, porcelain, plate, furniture, horses, carriages, books, jewellery to be realised within a twelvemonth of his death, and the proceeds thereof equally divided between the Asylum for Idiots and the Hospital for Incurables. By not so much as the bequest of a mourning ring does he acknowledge the virtues of his train.

The investigation of the circumstances attending Mr. Lyndhurst's death which the dead man's solicitor deems it his duty to make is a sore trial for Herman. The Belgian law requires no inquest, and the Belgian authorities are easily satisfied; but the solicitor affects a deep interest in the details of his client's death, and begs to be allowed to question Mrs. Westray upon the subject. The gossip of the hotel has made him acquainted with the

curious circumstances that preceded Hamilton Lyndhurst's death. He has been told how Mrs. Westray arrived in the early morning, and was shown straight to the apartment of an English traveller, who had not given his name, but had stated that he was there to meet his wife, whom he expected by the Dover boat. He has been told how the newly-risen household was disturbed by the lady's shrieks, and how the English stranger was found lying dead at her feet.

Mrs. Westray declares herself willing to answer any inquiries Mr. Lomax, the solicitor, may wish to ask; and Herman, not seeing his way to the avoidance of such inquiries, allows Mr. Lomax the desired interview. Quietly and succinctly Editha relates how she came to Ostend in answer to a telegram sent in her husband's name—came expecting to find him ill at that hotel, and that she found herself face to face with Hamilton Lyndhurst.

"Do you suppose that my lamented client sent you the telegram?" asks the lawyer.

"I can but suppose so."

"Have you any idea of his motive in sending such a message?"

"That is a question which I would rather not answer."

"And it is a question to which I strongly object," Herman interposes.

"Will you allow me to see the telegram?" asks the lawyer.

"I have lost it," Editha answers calmly.

She confronts her questioner like a statue, marble pale, but calmer than most women would seem in such a position.

The solicitor drops his eyelids and contemplates his boots for the next few moments benignly, a look that he is in the habit of assuming after having put a trying question to a client of the weaker sex. Then he casts a furtive glance at the husband, who sits immovable, gloomily watchful. This inability of Mrs. Westray's to produce the telegram seems to Mr. Lomax somewhat like Desdemona's helplessness in the matter of that strawberry-spotted handkerchief. And very likely Mrs. Westray is as innocent as Desdemona, poor thing, if one could only know all the facts of the case, though circumstances do point very strongly to an opposite conclusion.

Mr. Lomax has telegraphed to London for a surgeon of some standing, and this English surgeon has made a post-mortem examination in conjunction with the Belgian surgeon who was called in on the fatal morning. Medical science has laid bare the cause of Mr. Lyndhurst's death. There is nothing suspicious or mysterious in that event; no hint of foul play. There was organic disease of the heart, say the surgeons, of long standing. Whenever or wherever the end had come, it would in all probability have been just as sudden as it has been. Excitement, a

mental shock of any kind, may have hastened the evil hour, but the end has been inevitable for a long time.

Mr. Lomax (Lomax and Lomax, Viaduct-buildings, E.C.) professes himself grateful to Mrs. Westray for her amiable candour. "Curious business, this about the telegram, and of course very painful for the lady involved. Eccentric fellow, poor Lyndhurst, always," says the solicitor blandly. But Mr. Lomax is not prepared to admit that the telegram was actually sent by his deplored client, unless Mrs. Westray is herself assured upon that point.

"I know nothing, except that I was brought to this place by a most malicious falsehood, and that by God's help my husband was here before me."

After this there is no more to be said. Mr. Lomax is profusely apologetic for his intrusion, and retires, taking with him the conviction that death's dark curtain has fallen prematurely upon a drama that might have developed into a very stirring domestic tragedy. It is Mr. Lomax's misfortune to contemplate life turned the seamy side without, and to be anything rather than an optimist.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"Forsake me not thus. Witness, Heaven,
What love sincere and reverence in my heart
I bear thee, and unweeting have offended,
Unhappily deceived! Thy suppliant,
I beg and clasp thy knees; bereave me not,
Whereon I live, thy gentle looks, thy aid,
Thy counsel in this uttermost distress—
My only strength and stay."

THERE is a strange coldness in Herman's manner to his wife, reunited to him under circumstances so desperate. In her manner to him there is a quiet akin to apathy; pale, silent, uncomplaining, she lies on the sofa in the cheerless unhomelike room, littered with Herman's open portmanteau, travelling-bag, rug, and scattered papers as only a man can litter a room which he inhabits but for a few hours.

She lies with her face hidden from the light, content for the moment with the luxury of rest. Her brain has been so racked, her heart so tortured, she has feared and suffered so intensely within these last broken days and nights—the actual sum of hours she knows not—that there is no room in her brain for further anguish. Of troubles to come, of evil threatening her future, she takes no heed. Herman is safe and near her, and the horror of that awful half-hour in Hamilton Lyndhurst's room is swept away like a thunder-cloud which has enfolded her for a moment with peril of sudden fiery death, and then has driven past, and left her scatheless.

The dead man in his room yonder—that quiet clay so innocent of harm—marble face that a sinless child might kiss, placid brow with a look of ineffable repose, folded hands as in prayer—hands that perchance for thirty years have never been so folded—is *that* Hamilton Lyndhurst? She cannot link this solemn image with the bold bad man who stood before her a little while ago, audaciously confessing the treachery that had brought her to his presence. She lies resting, and now and then trying uneasily to solve that problem, how these two—the harmless dead and the wicked living—can be one and the same; while Herman paces to and fro, in and out of a door that leads into the adjoining room. His bedroom is one of a suite, and he has engaged the two additional rooms now for his wife's comfortable accommodation.

She hears him give the order about these rooms, and wonders that he should care to remain any longer at this Ostend hotel. For her own part, she is nervously anxious to escape from a scene whose every association is horrible.

"Why should we stay here, Herman?" she asks. "I long to get back to baby."

"No doubt. Separation from my son must be a sore affliction to you," says her husband in that new tone of his which strikes so harshly on her ear.

"We might go back to-night, Herman. There is nothing to detain us in this horrid place."

"I beg your pardon. I do not think you are strong enough to travel; and my own plans are unsettled just now. Until they are a little clearer I think it best for us to remain where we are."

He says no more; but closes the door behind him, and leaves her to wonder at his strangeness.

She is too weak just at first for any feeling beyond a blank vague wonder. She lies thinking of the change in her husband idly, dreamily, with an undefined sense of trouble and uneasiness. He is tired, perhaps; his brain disturbed and confused, as hers is; worn out by long watches at the scene of war; harassed by the thought of financial trouble at home. There are so many reasons to account for that strangeness in his manner.

"And yet it seems hard that he should be unkind to me in this time of trouble, when I have such need of all his love," she thinks piteously.

By-and-by, when that dull stupor of actual physical fatigue has worn off a little, painful thoughts take a stronger hold of her.

"Why should he be unkind—he who has never spoken coldly to me before to-day?" she asks herself; and suddenly, in a breath, there flashes upon her the memory of that hideous word whispered in her ear as they left the dead man's room: "Lover—your lover!"

She starts up from her sofa, pale to the lips, but with resolu-

tion lighting up her face, and goes into the adjoining room. Herman is seated in a despondent attitude by the table, his head leaning on his folded arms, his face hidden.

She goes softly to him, kneels by his side, and lays her hand upon his arm.

"Herman, Herman, my husband, my dearest, what is this cloud between us? Look at me, love; speak to me!"

He lifts his head, and turns a haggard face towards her, but his eyes are lowered gloomily, and refuse to meet hers.

"Is there any need for me to tell you what is amiss between us?" he asks. "Pray do not affect surprise. Do not let there be any acting on either side. There is nothing left for us but to confront calamity calmly. You have nothing to fear from me. I love you too well to inflict disgrace upon your name, or to cause you unnecessary pain. No newspaper shall ever tell the world the causes of our parting—scandal's avid ear shall never be gratified by the details of my wrongs or your—folly; but we are not the less parted, Editha"—his voice falters at the name—"for ever and for evermore."

She rises to her feet and confronts him proudly, a crimson spot burning in each pale cheek, shame's bitter red.

"Herman, you cannot be so wild—so wicked—as to believe that I—" The words choke her.

"Unhappily there are facts which admit but of one construction," answers her husband in that cold altered voice of his. "I find you here—alone—with that dead man. Can I doubt, as a reasoning being in the full possession of my senses, that you had come here to meet him?"

"As I live," she answers, with an upward look which makes the words seem an appeal to Heaven, "I came here in answer to a telegram sent in your name—came to my sick husband—came and found myself the dupe of a lying message. That dead man knows the rest, and God who hears me knows my innocence."

"Are you not afraid of another thunderbolt like that which scared Vivien when she lied as boldly as you lie now?" asks Herman bitterly. "Do you know that I had hints of what was to happen to me? I was brought to this place by a friendly warning; some tool or servant of yours or of your lover's betrayed your plans. Yes, I was told that you were to meet him here. I was informed that he had been like your shadow at Lochwithian—a man I ought to have feared at the outset, knowing what I knew of him, but his cunning was deep enough to hoodwink me. And then I did myself the honour to think you as high above such a tempter as the evening star is above the reach of Satan grovelling in his nethermost hell. A foolish mistake. Other men's experience should have taught me that all women are

alike—beautiful pictures, smiling, innocent, supernal; but who shall say what foul lining backs the canvas, what obscene devilry hides behind the saintly image?"

"You knew that I was to meet Mr. Lyndhurst?" asks Editha, bewildered.

"Yes. I had letters; the first telling me of Lyndhurst's visit to Lochwithian, and recommending me to be on my guard. I laughed at this warning, secure in my belief in you. The next letter spoke more plainly, and told me to come to this place without delay, if I wanted to know the truth. I came, but could discover nothing. Your friend was here under a false name; you were not in the house. I made myself sure of that before I lay down to get a few hours' sleep—such sleep, God help me! I was awakened by your screams."

"The same person who sent me the telegram may have sent you the letters. Anonymous letters, of course. We have been enmeshed in a web of lies, both of us. Perhaps that other is a lie too—a lie, though it came to me in your own handwriting."

"What do you mean?"

"Herman, you accuse me of falsehood. You believe—you, who should know every thought of my mind, every instinct of my heart—you believe that I am so vile a creature as to have sacrificed home and child, honour, name, love, my hope of heaven, my peace here and hereafter, at the bidding of that sinful man who died at my feet! I—who, till that miserable man bared his wicked heart before me, hardly knew that this world contained so much infamy. You think that I am vile enough to transfer my heart from you to him as I would change my glove! You do not know me well enough to know that I am yours to the core of my heart—that I have not—never can have—a hope or desire on earth that does not begin and end in you, our child, and the dear ones at home."

"I know nothing except that you were with that man. If he had not fallen dead at your feet, you might be far away from this place now—his mistress, happy, resplendent, laughing at your deserted husband. Fate has played you a sorry turn; and you, who might have been as magnificent as Cleopatra, are now reduced to the Magdalen's penitence and tears."

In his bitterness of heart he cannot wound her too deeply; he can find no words cruel enough to express the keenness of his own pain. In his agony he is merciless.

"Were you sinless yourself you could hardly be more bitter, Herman," says Editha with a sad smile, half scorn, half pity. "Yet I have a letter written by you to a woman you loved before you married me—a letter which proves you as false as a husband as you believe I have been as a wife."

"A letter written by me—a letter from me to any woman since

I have been your husband! Except business letters, which might be published to the world, I have written to no woman since I married you. So help me, Heaven!"

"O Herman, for pity's sake! God's wrath is swift to overtake false oaths. I have the letter in my travelling-bag—the shameful cruel letter, telling her that you have loved her always, that all other love has been a delusion, asking her to share your life—life without her is worthless!"

"Are you mad, Editha? Show me this letter. Or perhaps you have lost it, like the telegram. You may have a knack of losing compromising documents."

"I have not lost it."

"Let me see it, then. It is a forgery, I tell you before looking at it. A trick of your late admirer's, perhaps—one of the various treacheries that are fair in love or war."

"It is no forgery, Herman," she answers sadly. "I know your hand too well. If there had been room for doubt, I should never have believed." She goes into the next room and returns almost immediately, bringing him the half sheet of paper, which she has taken from the portfolio in her travelling-bag. He reads the lines with a curious smile.

"It is your writing, is it not, Herman?"

"Every word of it. Yes, Mrs. Westray, I certainly wrote this, and, what is more, I went so far as to have it set up in type, and you would, by-and-by, had you continued to be interested in my dramatic labours, have heard the lines spoken in public. It is the rough draft of a letter from Colonel St. Vincent, the hero of my last comedy, to Lady Madeline Rayner, whom he loves. You will find the style polished and strengthened in the printed version, I hope, if you ever take the trouble to read my play, but you will discover that the latter is essentially the same."

"And this letter was not written to Mrs. Brandreth?"

"No more than it was written to you, or the Archbishop of Canterbury. It was written one Sunday afternoon in Mrs. Brandreth's drawing-room, discussed with her, as a point in my play, approved by her, and then written a second time by me, as there were weak points in this first notion. You know I do not often make two copies of the same idea—neither my leisure nor my humour serve for this niceness—but stage letters are hard writing, and I was anxious this one should have a natural tone. Yes, you will find the printed version better."

He hands her the paper with supreme coolness—coldness tinged with contempt.

"Your counter-charge is wanting in force," he says, with biting irony; "an author's wife ought to have known a folio of copy. Women who receive love-letters of a compromising character do

not usually leave them lying about for other people to pick up. You should know this, for you have been careful that I should never find any letters of Lyndhurst's to you."

"Mr. Lyndhurst never wrote to me in my life," she answers.

"Indeed! A man of vast experience and wiser than his generation. He knew the safety of oral communication." A moment ago and she has been ready to fall on her knees at his feet and beseech his pardon for having doubted him, even though his own handwriting was his accuser. But at these words of insult her pride kindles, she recoils from him as if he had struck her. At the door she pauses, her hand on the lock, and looks at him more in wonder than in resentment.

"Does all our life together count for so little, Herman? I have no more to say. No, I will not stoop to defend myself. You will know some day. You will be sorry some day."

"That is what a good many women have said in their time," answers Herman, that pale pained face of his quite unmoved. "And the day has not come yet. Messalina and Faustina and a few more are waiting for it in Hades—the day that shall make their names white in the eyes of men."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"Call me a fool;

Trust not my reading nor my observations,
Which with experimental seal doth warrant
The tenor of my book; trust not my age,
My reverence, calling, nor divinity,
If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here
Under some biting error."

"Dieu n'a pas a pardonner. Il est plus grand que cela, il efface! Nous qui ne pouvons rien effacer, nous avons inventé le pardon qui punit puisqu'il rabaisse."

Yes, Herman Westray, guided by that blatant counsellor worldly wisdom, founding his judgment upon experience of life, has decided against the woman who appeared to him three years ago the incarnation of womanly purity. The very thought of her innocence then weighs against her in his mind now.

"God help me!" he says to himself as he paces the darkened room in the hotel at Ostend. He has closed the heavy venetian shutters, glad to exclude the garish unsympathetic sun, glaring at him in fierce September brightness, if he ventures to put his head out of the window. Blue sky above, blue sea below; white houses on either side; and a holiday crowd going to and fro yonder on the digue, or bobbing up and down in parti-coloured raiment in the sea; holiday music blaring on a brazen band; a foolish unreasoning joyfulness everywhere, as it seems to this man, stung to the heart, his household gods shattered, his

life brought suddenly to a standstill, his future blotted out: for the man who has lost hope has no future. What is man's notion of his earthly future but a mirage picture painted by Hope upon the sands of life? And how often it happens, as the wanderer advances, that the picture vanishes and the barren sands remain.

"God help me!" exclaims Herman. "It is generally this kind of woman—an innocent guileless smiling creature—who takes a sudden turn some day, and astonishes every one by going utterly to the bad. A woman of the world would have flirted with Lyndhurst, made him her slave, bled him of opera tickets and hothouse flowers, French gloves and fans, and laughed his advances to scorn. My wife sits by her fireside with her baby in her lap while that devil talks to me, and never by so much as a look or a tone betrays his influence upon her—marble could not seem colder, or snow purer; yet one fine morning she bolts with him, or comes here to meet him, which is quite as bad and a little more artful. And he is dead—dead," reiterates Herman savagely, "and I can never wring the truth from his false throat. Death steps between us, and cheats me of my just revenge."

Not without some deliberation, even though his passion has not cooled yet, has Herman condemned his wife. He has turned that story of hers about in his mind, and he cannot believe her. He cannot believe that Hamilton Lyndhurst would have brought her to this place like a snared bird. There is a wild romance in the act—treacherous, vile as it is—which seems to him impossible in these latter days of easy-going sin. The Lovelace of the nineteenth century wins his Clarissa without soiling his fingers. No dirty tools, no roundabout or subterranean ways are needful to the accomplishment of his victory. He speaks, and she hears. Express trains, continental seclusion, and the Divorce Court do the rest.

"Lyndhurst was not a man to snare an unwilling victim," he tells himself.

What is he to do? Believing this wife, so dearly loved, so entirely trusted one little week ago—believing her guilty at least in intention, guilty of abandoning him and heaven for the love of that dead profligate—what is he to do? His first and most abiding thought is how best to shield her, how best to save her from the shame her sin has too well deserved—to suppress the scandal that is too likely to arise from her presence at that awful death scene—to sever himself from her for life, yet spare her the disgrace of separation.

Not without some leaven of selfishness in his weaker hours, he is, in this crisis of his life, utterly unselfish. It is of his wife he thinks, of her welfare, her good name, and he is ready for any sacrifice that can serve and shield her.

"I will exile myself," he thinks. "Heaven knows, London,

England, all familiar places will be hateful to me after this bitter blow. I will never go back any more. Let them sell me up at Fulham, and my name appear in the *Gazette*, and let my good friends and the public believe that I have run away from my creditors—that I am an outlaw afraid to face English respectability. The world is wide enough. I shall be a shade less miserable a thousand miles from civilisation. And then her good name will not suffer. She will go home to her father, and society will compassionate the victim, instead of stoning the sinner. I don't know, for my own part, which is hardest to bear, the stoning or the compassion; but she is a woman, and may be able to endure pity."

He stops in his rapid walk up and down—holds himself by the hair of his head, as if he were trying to reduce his feverish brain to order by that rough handling, and bethinks himself what next he should do for her welfare.

They two cannot spend many hours more of life together. To see that sad sweet face—to know her lost to him, yet know her near—to see the temple that once was lighted by so fair and pure a spirit, and know that the soul within that lovely form is spotted and defiled,—this is too deep an agony.

"She must go to Lochwithian," he thinks; "Fulham means home no longer. She must go back to her father, and her father must be told that I am a fool and a swindler, and that exile is unavoidable for me for the next few years. They will be glad to have her back in their peaceful valley. And she will go to church twice a day, and visit the sick, and wipe out her sin with many tears and prayers and good works, and be happy again, perhaps, by-and-by, when time has blunted the edge of pain, and she can look back at her married life as if it were a bad dream dimly remembered. Poor soul, poor soul! And we began life so gaily two years ago, and meant to be so happy together."

The memory of that glad beginning moves him to tears, the first he has shed. Bitter, unaccustomed tears, which rend him as the evil spirits tore at the soul of their victim before they loosed their grip.

He must send her back to her father, under safe conduct; but with whom? Has he, has she, any friend to be trusted in such an emergency? Yes, there is one he fancies he may safely confide in—one who from first to last has shown himself friendly, honest, faithful—Richard Dewrance, dignified by his sacred calling, a man who knows the world, and can answer the voice of slander, should it assail Mrs. Westray by-and-by.

Herman's mind is made up quickly on this point. Dewrance is the friend who can help him now. He goes out at once and telegraphs to the curate of St. Januarius, begging him to come to Ostend immediately, if he wishes to do Mrs. Westray a great service.

"That poor fellow would go to the end of the world for Editha's sake," thinks Herman, remembering Dewrance's tacit adoration of Miss Morcombe, and his heroic resignation in the hour of his rival's triumph.

Dewrance, a man who knows the world, and who can hold his tongue—two strong points in a friend.

At seven o'clock next morning Richard Dewrance and Herman Westray are seated face to face at the breakfast-table. That meal has been ordered for the traveller, who has not long embarked from the Dover boat. Herman drinks a cup of coffee, but can eat nothing. He has been up all night, feverish, unresting, and has spent the dismal hours betwixt night and morning on the quay, waiting for the arrival of the packet, feeling very sure that the curate will be prompt to obey his summons. Dewrance is horror-struck at the change in him, now that he sees him in the full light of the newly-risen sun.

"Why, in mercy's name, Westray, what has happened? What have you been doing to yourself? Is there anything wrong—is your wife ill?" asks Dewrance.

"My wife is—well. Make your mind easy on that point."

"Thank God! I thought the best answer to your telegram was to come as fast as the steamer would bring me—no use wasting money on a reply. And now tell me what's the matter. Money difficulties of course—I've heard rumours—and you want my advice."

"Hardly, for my mind is made up. I won't insult you by pretending to ask for counsel when my plan is irrevocably formed. What I want from you is help to carry out my plan."

Herman proceeds to explain himself, but somewhat lamely. He tells Dewrance the story which he wishes Dewrance to tell Mr. Morcombe and the polite world by-and-by—tells him a story of debt and difficulty and enforced exile.

"And you are going to send your wife home, to eat her heart in that solitary valley, while you roam about the Continent like a modern Wandering Jew, with the certainty of ultimately landing yourself at Homburg or Monaco and going speedily to the dogs. My dear fellow, I think from the lips of reason I never heard so preposterous a scheme, and an Anglican priest in a fashionable neighbourhood has considerable experience of human folly, I can assure you."

"Call me a fool, if you like, Dewrance. My mind is made up."

"You want to break your wife's heart, and go to the bad yourself, because you happen to have outrun the constable, when all you have to do is to look your difficulties straight in the face, meet them and conquer them like a man. Nobody's creditors are harsh or implacable nowadays; they have only to see that their debtor means honestly, and they will roar like sucking doves. Put yourself in my hands, that's a good fellow. The

bill of sale is an awkward business, I confess, and unless your publisher will help you out of that difficulty, I fear you must lose your furniture. But what of that? You can rub along in furnished lodgings very well for a year or two, and will live as cheaply again as you have been living, without the burden of a house and servants. As for Mrs. Westray, she loves you too well to—"

That last half sentence stabs Herman to the heart. His fortitude abandons him for a moment, and Dewrance sees the real state of the case before he has recovered his composure.

"She loves me so well that she and I will be better apart for the rest of our lives," he exclaims bitterly.

"Westray!" cries the curate, "this talk about your creditors is all bosh. You have quarrelled with your wife."

"No; there has been no quarrel—not a word, not a breath. When she left me six weeks ago to go to Lochwithian, and laid her head upon my breast, and looked up at me with her loving tearful eyes, I thought there was nothing on this wicked earth so fair and pure and true as my wife; and now—"

He breaks down altogether here, and angrily dashes the unwilling tears from his eyes.

"And now she is just as fair and true and pure as when you parted from her," says the curate with conviction. "Purity and Editha are inseparable."

Herman turns from his counsellor impatiently, paces the room for a minute or two, and then comes back to him.

"Dewrance," he says impetuously, "can I trust you?"

"I am a priest," answers Dewrance. "That is answer enough. But let there be no half-confidence. Trust me all in all, or not at all."

"I will tell you everything; yes, though it condemns her."

He tells the story of that awful night, not so many hours ago, when all is said, but making a barrier between the hopeful past and the hopeless future strong as those gates of adamant by which Sin and Death keep their eternal watch and ward. He tells all, and pronounces his wife's condemnation.

Dewrance listens with grave attention, and says not a word till Herman has finished.

"She gives you a very simple reason for her presence here," he says at last. "Why do you not believe her?"

"Because the fiction is too palpable, and I had been warned. While I was with the French at Sedan I received a letter in a strange hand, telling me that if I came to this hotel on such a night I should make a discovery which concerned me deeply. I had my information."

"From an anonymous letter," replies Dewrance contemptuously. "No one but a scoundrel ever writes an anonymous letter, or puts his pen to paper to the injury of a woman's character. Now you can hardly expect unalloyed truth from a scoundrel, yet you

choose to believe the anonymous libeller in preference to your wife. Now I, who have not had the honour to be Miss Morcombe's husband, choose to believe in her purity ; yes, and would so believe though all the voices of this earth united to condemn her," adds the curate, with a little burst of passion.

Herman seizes him by the hand vehemently.

"You are a good fellow, Dewrance. Upon my soul I think you are right ! Yes, it is hard to believe her less than we have thought her—less than the best and purest among women. But to find her here with that man? If you knew his character as I do—"

"Yet you admitted him to your house ?"

"Yes ; because I thought my wife like Una—above and beyond contagion ; and believed that even he, at his worst, would respect such purity."

"Such men respect nothing. Now, Westray, be reasonable. Instead of this pig-headed idea of yours, that a woman whom you have known and honoured as the purest of her sex could go to destruction all of a sudden at the beck of a profligate, call reason and experience to your aid. You have known her pure and true and unselfish and devoted—high-principled and religious. Trust your past experience of her character, and leave me to unearth the mystery of the telegram. And now go—go to your wife, and ask her to forgive you for having doubted her, if she knows that you have doubted her."

"If she knows ? She knows too well ! I have been brutal to her," says Herman gloomily. "If she is stainless—as you believe, as I hope—she can never forgive me. I have said the bitterest things in my blind rage. I have been cruel, senseless, inexcusable, unless I am justified in all I said."

"She will forgive you as Heaven forgives," replies Dewrance.

"She is all sweetness and pity and pardon. Go to her."

"How can I go to her ? how can I bear to look in her eyes, once so true, so fearless, when I half believe she came here—false wife, degraded woman—to meet that man ?"

"No one but a madman could believe that. You have been out of your right mind while you thought it. Go to her—go down on your knees before her, and tell her you have been mad, and you are sane again. I pledge myself to make all things clear. I will find the writer of those libellous letters. I will trace the sender of the telegram. I do not ask you to take your wife to your heart again till I have succeeded ; but I do ask you to seek for pardon from an offended woman, whose purity you have outraged."

Herman, who has gone a little way towards the door of his wife's room, hesitates, only half convinced.

"I will take her to Lochwithian, if you like," adds Dewrance.

"You have no home for her. I will see her safe with her father

and sister ; but I will do nothing till you have obtained her pardon. I will not let her leave this house under the shadow of unmerited suspicion. In this at least I claim the authority of a brother, and will see her righted."

"You are an honest fellow, Dewrance. Yes ; I will go to her, and will apologise for—my brutality. I ought to have been more courteous—even if—even—" He cannot finish the sentence, but opens the door suddenly, and enters the adjoining room.

Editha is standing by the window, looking out at the sea smiling up at the morning sky. All is bright and gay without—within there is the heavy gloom of despair. She turns her pallid face towards her husband almost for the first time in her life without a smile. Hopelessly sad are the heavy eyes ; but the steady truthful gaze is unchanged.

"Editha," begins Herman, going up to her slowly, half reluctantly, "I have been talking to an old friend of yours, Richard Dewrance."

"He here ?" she says with languid surprise.

"He has convinced me that I have behaved abominably—that I have been harsh—bitter—unnecessarily cruel. That—let circumstances seem to condemn you as they might—I have no right to doubt. Editha, can you forgive me ?"

She looks at him for a moment doubtfully, too deeply moved for words.

"Herman, I have nothing to forgive. I have never been angry ; I have only been sorry that you could doubt me—grieved to the very heart. And yet I doubted you—"

A moment more and she is sobbing on his shoulder, clasped to his heart.

"Yes, dearest, we have each something to pardon ; we forgive each other. My darling, my own true wife, look up. Dewrance is right. I was a lunatic when I doubted you. My sweetest, no more tears. I will find the sender of that accursed telegram, the writer of those devilish letters. Dewrance," he calls, "Dewrance, come here, true friend, faithful priest ; the cloud has lifted ; my darling and I trust each other once more, never to doubt again."

Dewrance comes in, smiling calmly, and sees the wife leaning on her husband's breast.

"You have been very quick about it," he says placidly.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Eusèbe avait déposé sa volonté sur l'étagère de sa maîtresse, parmi d'autres chinoïseries."

LORD EARLSWOOD calls at the pretty little house in Kensington Gore the morning after his arrival in London. He is quite aware

that the proprieties demand a certain delay before his union with Myra, but he wants to have the question settled on the lady's part with as little loss of time as possible.

"Let me once know how I stand, and I can go to Scotland and knock about very comfortably for the winter," he tells himself; "or I shouldn't mind a cruise in the Mediterranean with old Shlooker. Jolly old bird on board a yacht is old Shlooker; knows the ropes, and can keep a fellow amused; smokes like a furnace, can take the tiller occasionally, and can cook an omelette or an Irish stew, and plays *écarté* better than any man I know—excellent company Shlooker. Yes; I could be quite happy in my mind for the next six months, if I knew that Myra would have me when the time was up. But I must have things put square upon that point."

The house in Kensington Gore is wrapped up in brown paper like a toy just sent home from the toy-shop. The matron in charge informs Lord Earlswood that Mrs. Brandreth has gone to "Eldenbridge, in Beljum."

"Bless my soul! when did she go?"

"About a week ago, sir; leastways a week come Thursday."

This is too elaborate a calculation for his lordship.

"Anybody with her?"

"Nobody but her own maid, sir."

"O," says Lord Earlswood, turning on his heel. "Vexatious rather," he says to himself. "I detest steamers. Good mind to send down to Plymouth for the *Argo*, and take old Shlooker to Belgium. Slow business that though, and I want this question settled at once. I suppose I must put up with the steamer."

A balloon would be more agreeable to Lord Earlswood, or a submarine railway, or a patent gutta-percha apparatus. It seems to him a hard thing that, across the Channel, a man with coal-mines and a rent-roll can go no faster than a mere bagman.

"What could induce Brandreth to choose such a place as Heldenburg for her holidays?" thinks his lordship, as he drives to his family solicitor to make certain arrangements before starting by that evening's mail. He knows not how long he may be away, or where he may go; but if it were needful to follow Myra Brandreth over the continent of Europe to obtain an answer to that vital question he is so eager to ask he would so follow her. The Alps would be no barrier, the Balkan range would not stop him.

"Such a stoopid place to choose," he muses; "and she's been there before too. Never go to places where I've been before, except Brighton or Paris—absolute waste of time. Curious woman—no accounting for her taste. Likes a thing one day, and detests it the next. Hope I shall find her in a good temper."

That night's steamer carries Lord Earlswood to Calais; from

Calais a train, with some pretensions to swiftness, bears him on to Ostend. At Ostend he breakfasts and takes a Turkish bath, arrays himself in fresh-looking gray homespun, puts two or three pairs of lavender gloves in his pocket, sprinkles himself with Ess bouquet, and proceeds by the native leisurely train to Heldenburg.

He remembers his mission to the same place two years ago, when he fancied that, as bearer of the tidings of Herman Westray's marriage, he should discover the state of Mrs. Brandreth's feelings for that gentleman. He had an idea that a woman always fainted, or shrieked, or beat the carpet with the heels of her boots—like the famous Mrs. Pott at Eatanswill—when she heard anything that hurt her feelings. Myra had received his communication with ineffable tranquillity, had looked him in the face and smiled; *ergo* she had never cared for the Benedict. Satisfied upon this point in some measure, Lord Earlswood had been not the less provoked to jealousy by those half *tête-à-têtes* which Herman was permitted to enjoy in the inner drawing-room at Kensington Gore.

Everything at Heldenburg looks just as it did that last time, as Lord Earlswood goes up the stone steps that divide the quaint and picturesque-looking old town from the brand-new white houses and green venetians of modern Heldenburg. There have been a few more white houses added perhaps within the two years. The terraces fronting the sea have grown a little longer, sandy foundations for more houses are being dug out yonder. Heldenburg has evidently prospered, and is prospering. The rabbits are driven away from the sandy dunes where they did erst disport themselves; the mussels are getting as scarce as whitebait.

Lord Earlswood proceeds straight to the office of the hotel, where an intelligent female, in the freshest of caps, gives him the information he requires. Mrs. Brandreth occupies an apartment *au premier* in the last house but one to the right.

He is not so fortunate as to see Mrs. Brandreth in the balcony this time, but on reaching the first-floor finds her servant, who shows him into the drawing-room. There is the same satin-lined basket, with the same strip of point-lace on blue cambric, or one very like it; there are flowers and books and terra-cotta statuettes. In a word, the stage is dressed with Myra's usual taste, but Myra herself has a worn and faded look, Lord Earlswood thinks, as she enters from the adjoining room, dressed in white cashmere—an opaque creamy white—with her hair loosely arranged, looking like a picture by Whistler.

She is not the less beautiful in his eyes for being a little "off colour," for his passion is at that stage, and has long been, when change in the object brings no change in the feeling of the adorer. Were she gradually to become hideous, he would not know it.

His coming is not pleasing to her. He can see that but too plainly; and the sense of her displeasure stings him, knowing that he has come to offer her place and power in the world, with his own heart as a make-weight.

"I'm afraid you're not over glad to see me," he says; "yet I came over on purpose to see you."

"So you did two years ago when you came to tell me of Mr. Westray's marriage," she answers, sinking wearily into a chair by the open window. She has the air of being worried, and the hand with which she pushes back the loose hair from her forehead is faintly tremulous. "You have a mania for rushing about upon wild-goose chases. Have you any tremendous news for me to-day?"

"Yes, Myra. My wife is dead, and I am a free man. Didn't you know it?"

"No; I seldom look at the morning papers. I suppose I ought to congratulate you, rather than condole with you, as your marriage was not a happy one."

He draws his chair near hers, and looks at her earnestly, beseechingly even, a very slave in his devotion to her.

"My first marriage was a miserable one. All the world knows that, though I believe Lady Earlswood was a very good sort of person in her own particular style. But it wasn't my style, you see. What is my next marriage to be like, Myra?"

She laughs nervously.

"I must refer you to the lady you may honour by your choice," she says. "I would recommend you to be deliberate in your selection. You have found your matrimonial chains heavy. There can be no hurry for you to fetter yourself again."

"Come, Myra, you must know that my choice was made three years ago; that nothing—not even unkindness from the woman I love—could alter my feelings on that point. There never was but one woman who exercised any influence upon my life. There is only one woman who can make me happy: and her name is Myra Brandreth."

"A dream, a delusion!" exclaims Myra. "It was all very well to build a theatre for me, and to get rid of your Sunday afternoons in my drawing-room, but you never could have meant anything more than that."

"I always meant to make you my wife, if Providence ever gave me the opportunity. Don't tell me that you can have the heart to refuse me, Myra, now the chance has come. Don't tell me that you haven't known of my love all along."

"You are a faithful, devoted creature," exclaims Myra, looking at him with a touch of genuine admiration. "And I wish I were better worthy of such generous affection. But I never have been worthy of an honest man's love at the hour it was offered

to me. True love passed me by once, and might have been mine, but I let it go." She has risen from her seat by the window, and is walking slowly up and down the room, deeply thoughtful.

"Myra, make me happy. I only want your answer, your promise to be my wife, and then I'll go to Scotland or somewhere, and won't worry you with my society for the next six months, if you like."

"And you would make me a peeress!" she exclaims, turning her kindling eyes upon him, her face, so wan before, lighted with excitement. "You would place me above the women who have held themselves aloof from me, and looked at me in the Park as if my presence among them was an impertinence. You would give me a palace in London, and three or four country seats, and all the pageantry of fashionable life. You would set me abreast with the mightiest in the land. You would do all this for me—you, Lord Earlswood, to whom I have never been particularly civil!"

"There is nothing I possess in this world that I value for its own sake half so much as for the power to give it to you," said his lordship, deeply moved. "There never was a woman so fit to be a peeress."

"If a good fairy had offered me this gift years ago at Colehaven, when I was an ambitious girl, how gladly I should have accepted it! All good things come to me, but at the wrong time. Fate and the hour are never propitious."

"Myra, your answer is yes, is it not?" demands Lord Earlswood anxiously.

"My answer is no," she replies. "I am grateful for your generous offer. It would suit my humour well to be a peeress, and trample upon the necks of a few women I know. I feel sometimes as if I had been born for place and power in the world. But there is something better. Yes, true love is better; and unhappily, I do not love you."

"I—I never expected that," falters Lord Earlswood. "I don't ask you to love me—not at first. I couldn't take such a liberty. But if you will only tolerate me, to begin with, you might come in time to find me not—utterly detestable; and eventually you might be rather fond of me. I should be so proud of you. I should try so hard to make your life happy."

"You are the most generous of men, and I should be—yes, I believe I should be positively happy as your wife, if—"

"If what, Myra?" he cries eagerly, as she hesitates. Hope dawns upon him again.

"If I had not a brighter dream, a fairer hope," she answers with a far-away look.

"Dreams and hopes are, in a general way, rubbish," he says. "I offer you fifty thousand a year and a coronet. That's a tangible proposal."

"I cannot forego my dream."

"And, after I have been your slave for three years, you will send me away hopeless?" he remonstrates, with a dismal countenance. "Remember, Myra, I shall be done for if you refuse me. It'll be a case of moral murder; for I shall take the quickest possible way of ruining myself—financially, if I can—constitutionally without doubt. I shall take to gambling and chloral. I daresay when next you hear of me it will be in the announcement of untimely deaths. Good-bye!"

"Stay one moment, Lord Earlswood," cries Myra.

"A century, if you like."

"Shall I strike a bargain with you?"

"Say you'll be my wife in six months from to-day."

"No; I can't do that. But if a year hence I am still a free woman, you may claim me."

"That means that you know you are going to marry some one else in the interim," says his lordship ruefully.

"I know nothing. My future is veiled in obscurity. But if a year hence my hope is not realised, I shall know that it never will be, and I shall be free to marry you; and if I cannot give you my love, at the worst you shall have my gratitude and esteem."

"That is all I ask. But a year is such a long time."

"One London season, a little fishing and shooting, and the year is over."

"Well, I suppose I must be satisfied, but it's rather hard upon a fellow."

He pleads for some time longer, pleads and argues with as much eloquence as he can command; but Myra is firm as a rock, and he ultimately departs, sorely disappointed, though not without hope.

"You are going back to London immediately, I suppose?" she says as he is leaving her.

"Well—not quite; at least, I've not made up my mind. Rather a nice hotel here—think I shall stay a day or two."

Myra's face clouds a little at this. Lord Earlswood sees the shadow, and is all the more bent upon remaining. That other fellow whom she loves must be here, thinks his lordship, and he may find out the mystery of her hopes and dreams, if he exercises his powers of observation.

"I fancy you'll be tired of Heldenburg in a couple of hours."

"Not if you allow me to look in for an hour or so in the evening."

Positive affliction expresses itself with painful distinctness in Mrs. Brandreth's countenance.

"O, if you have nothing better to do with yourself I suppose you must come," she says wearily, "but I warn you that I shall be dismal company. Last season's incessant work almost wore me out. I am but half alive, and came here to vegetate."

"I'll come and vegetate with you for a little. I wouldn't much mind being one of two zoophites sticking side by side to a rock provided you were the other one," replies his lordship; and with a languid shake hands they part.

Lord Earlswood has so sedulously trained his countenance to an expression of gentlemanlike vacuity that, though he loves to distraction, his features portray only indifference. He has but one look—a look which he would carry with him to the hymeneal altar, or the block.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"From that day forth, in Peace and joyous Bliss
They lived together long without debate;
Ne private Jarre, ne spite of Enemies,
Could shake the safe assurance of their state."

ONCE having looked into his wife's true eyes, once having held her to his troubled heart, there is no more possibility of doubt for Herman Westray. It was only while he kept himself resolutely aloof from her that he could think her changed; that he could believe, as he has believed, that fair and perfect form a whited sepulchre, concealing inward pollution. Confidence, love, sympathy, all life's sweetest things have returned to Herman and Editha, and they discuss the future with honest friendly Dewrance, happy and hopeful once again, seated side by side, looking out at the opal sea, and the bathers in their many-coloured raiment, and the blue smiling sky, and feeling the universe in harmony with their own hearts once again. And what of their troubles? That dreadful man in possession, for instance? That bill of sale, which means annihilation of their pretty home? These are but ciphers in the sum of life when that mighty total Love appears on the right side of the ledger.

It is settled in friendly counsel that Editha shall go back to England by this evening's boat, escorted by Mr. Dewrance. They will proceed straight to Roehampton, pick up nurse and baby, and then travel to Lochwithian, where Mrs. Westray is to remain safely lodged beneath the paternal roof-tree, while Herman gets through his difficulties, and sells off his furniture as advantageously as he can in liquidation of that luckless bill of sale.

"Do you know much of the man who holds it?" asks Dewrance.

"I don't know any good of him, except that he showed himself rather friendly in his dealings with me. He's a sixty per center in a general way: but he accommodated me on pretty reasonable terms, taking the bill of sale as his security. Of course I was a fool to go to him, but I thought I should right myself in a month or two. It was only a temporary expedient,"

"One of those temporary expedients which mean permanent ruin," observes the sagacious Dewrance. "I shouldn't wonder if Mr. Lyndhurst had a finger in this bill-of-sale business."

Westray's face darkens.

"It was Lyndhurst who introduced me to the money-lender," he says.

"Wheels within wheels. You may be thankful to have lost no more than your furniture."

For sole reply Herman kisses his wife's hand.

"Herman," she says pleadingly, "if you could only make up your mind to come down to us when your troubles are over, and live at Lochwithian for a little while—with papa if you liked—or in a cottage of our own if you preferred it."

"In our own cottage, dearest; we will have our own ingle-nook, were it ever so humble. Yes, dear, I will live in Wales. I will live wherever you can be happiest. I will turn my back on this hard bad world, and live in rustic tranquillity with you, and work honestly at my calling, and write for posterity."

"O, come now, don't be too ambitious," expostulates Dewrance, "you must write books that will sell: books written for the future are rarely popular in the present. And they don't always reach the future either. They're like the drift people: we know precious little about them."

Editha talks of that cottage on the slope of the hill at Lochwithian, and Herman is charmed with her description. He feels that it is in him to lead the Wordsworthian life, and think as Wordsworth thought, and achieve a new reputation. Perhaps every literary man has that yearning for a new reputation. Bulwer Lytton had it always, and was always winning a new crown unawares. Critics and public awarded the prize before they recognised the claimant. But it is given to very few men thus to succeed.

It is like a new courtship this happy hour of reconciliation, and Herman and his wife talk of the future as if they were planning their honeymoon. Between that blissful future and the immediate present there lies a gulf of parting, but Editha tries to ignore that dread abyss.

"It will not take you very long to settle your affairs in London, will it, Herman?" she asks.

"Not long, dear. I shall make short work of my difficulties, I assure you."

"Why should I not stay at Roehampton till all is settled? It would be so much nicer to be near you."

"Much nicer for me, darling, but you will be better off at Lochwithian. I could not bear the idea of my wife being in a suburban lodging while her home was in process of destruction, hiding as it were from the eye of the world. The Priory is your

proper place, dearest, at such a time, or I would not banish you. And you will be with Ruth, remember."

"Yes, that is a happiness. Dear Ruth! O, Herman, I have sometimes thought lately that she is fading from us, that God will part me from my sister."

"My love, there are some people who bear the seal of eternal youth. Your sister is one who seems hardly meant to grow old in this world."

The thought of that threatened loss saddens Editha in the midst of her happiness, and Dewrance is glad to break in upon the conversation with some practical remark about *Bradshaw* and the Radnorshire trains.

It has been agreed between Mr. Westray and the Curate that Herman is to stay at Ostend and do his best to discover the sender of the telegram. Should he require further aid from Dewrance, that faithful friend will return at his summons; but this seems unlikely. Editha knows why her husband is remaining, and approves; there is perfect confidence between them now.

The afternoon wears away—too fast for these reunited lovers. They go for a walk with Dewrance, who knows Ostend by heart, and shows them the old churches, and holds forth upon ecclesiastical architecture and Flemish art, while Herman and his wife stand side by side in the dusky aisle, thinking more of each other than of those angular Madonnas with high cheek-bones and closely-plaited auburn hair, florid Netherlandish complexions, and draperies whose glowing crimsons and vivid blues time has not faded, or sun bleached, or mildew tarnished.

A peaceful day—with a touch of sadness, for they are so soon to part, but with a deep sense of recovered happiness—a day which hangs a little heavily for Dewrance, but for these two is so swift to pass away. Evening comes, and they are standing on the lamplit quay; a few last loving words, a tender pressure of the hand, a clamorous bell ringing greedily, as if it grudged them the sweet sadness of parting, and they are divided. The boat dips and plunges. The lights of the town begin to bob up and down. Dewrance draws Editha's shawl round her as the autumn wind blows keenly across the sandy dunes, and Herman is left behind. Editha's eyes grow dim with tears.

"How glad baby will be to see you!" says that judicious Dewrance. "I suppose he has grown ever so much since I saw him last."

Mrs. Westray brightens and begins to talk about baby, and, cheered by this conversation, descends by-and-by to the cabin where she sleeps peacefully to the ocean lullaby; the first peaceful slumber she has known since she left Roehampton at the bidding of that false summons.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"A lie will gain
The goal, although from land to land,
To get there, round the world it run,
While Truth, half-waked, with drowsy hand
Her travelling trim is buckling on.
All treachery could devise hath wrought
Against us—letters robb'd and read,
Snares hid in smiles, betrayal bought."

TRANQUILLISED by reconciliation with his wife, Herman does what a wiser man might have done at the outset. He consults a local solicitor, and with that gentleman for his companion proceeds to the telegraph office and endeavours to identify the sender of that lying message.

The telegraph clerks are at first disinclined to answer questions. It is against the rule that they should do so. It is impossible that they should remember the senders of telegrams or the circumstances, whether ordinary or extraordinary, attending the sending thereof.

"But if your system is used for a mischievous purpose, as it easily may be, don't you think it is your duty to give all the help you can in unearthing the offender?" asks Herman hotly.

The telegraphists have not considered the question in that light. They are of opinion that their duty lies chiefly in minding their own business, and holding themselves rigidly within the narrow lines of routine.

The Belgian lawyer lays his hand upon Herman's sleeve soothingly.

"Permit me, monsieur," he says; and then with infinite courtesy presents the question to the officials: "A false message, purporting to come from this gentleman, has been sent to this gentleman's wife, summoning her to Ostend—to his death-bed. Figure to yourself, then, the alarm of madame. Must one permit such a baseness? But it is an abuse of the system of telegraphy."

The officials know the man of law, and to a fellow-townsmen are more communicative than to Herman. They exercise their memories, look back at their books, whisper together a little, and finally show themselves willing to afford any information in their power. There is the message, in the words Editha has repeated to her husband, but nobody in the office can remember anything about the sender of that particular telegram.

"It might be that it was Alphonse who took the message," says one, when Herman is on the point of leaving the office in despair.

Alphonse is juvenile and an underling. The second official hardly thinks it likely that it was Alphonse. While the two clerks discuss this question the swinging door opens and

Alphonse enters, flushed and oleaginous from the café where he has breakfasted at 1 franc 25 centimes, wine included.

"But here is the young man of which it acts. Say then, Alphonse;" and both clerks assail him at once with eager questioning.

Alphonse blushes, wipes his moustache still bedewed with the last drops of Macon, and confesses to remembering the sending of a message to England, to some place near London, on the date Herman has mentioned.

"I remember, because it was sent by two persons, a lady and a gentleman," he says; "and they have talked much before sending it, and they have disputed between themselves as to the words, and the lady she was pale like the death."

"A lady!" exclaims Herman, puzzled. "What need of a woman's handiwork in this black business?" he asks himself.

"Yes, a lady, young and handsome, or at least not an all-young girl—*une dame posée*. She held herself all quietly," continues Alphonse, interested in his subject, "and she had the air to give her orders to this monsieur, but she was not the less agitated. Her inferior lip trembled a little. I have remarked it."

"Describe her," cries Herman. "The man I know: tall, stout, dark, pale, with black whiskers."

"But precisely. It is he."

"Describe this woman."

Alphonse bursts into pantomime.

"Permit, monsieur, it is not so easy to describe a handsome woman. That does not describe itself. Madame has the eyes of a beautiful brown—*une chevelure*, mais *une si belle chevelure*, châtain clair. She is tall, svelte. She is gloved to ravish. Her toilette is of an exquisite simplicity. She has the vivacity, the fashions of an artist," Alphonse thinks.

Warmed with le petit vin rouge which has accompanied his breakfast of bullock's kidney *aux champignons*, Alphonse is enthusiastic and diffuse. The English lady has evidently made an impression upon the susceptible heart of this telegraphic youth.

Herman's brow darkens ominously as he hears and meditates on what he has heard. There is one woman whom Alphonse's description fits to a nicety; but no, he cannot think that she—Colonel Clitheroe's daughter, the woman he played with as a child—could soil her honour thus—could sink to such a nethermost depth of infamy. And after all it is difficult to fix an image with mere words. Alphonse's glowing description might depicture twenty women. Lyndhurst's feminine acquaintance were doubtless numerous. Strange though that any woman, however fallen, should lend herself to this foul scheme. Strange that a woman's aid should be needed in so simple a matter as the

sending of the telegram. Would not the fact of this woman's presence imply that she was rather the instigator than the abettor of Lyndhurst's treachery?

"But I recall myself," exclaims Alphonse suddenly, while Herman is darkly considering possibilities; "if monsieur would well be certified there is a means."

"What means?" cries Herman.

"Madame has let fall her pocket-handkerchief at the moment of leaving the bureau. I have picked it up, and kept it, believing that she would return to seek it. It carries her monogram at the corner. It is at the service of monsieur if he wishes it."

"I'll give you a sovereign for it," exclaims Herman.

"But, monsieur," pleads Alphonse, with a cunning twinkle in his small black eyes, "the lace with which it is bordered is of a value."

"Two sovereigns!" says Herman.

Alphonse opens his desk and hands a filmy cambric handkerchief, Valenciennes bordered, across the counter to Herman.

"Since madame will evidently not return to claim it," he murmurs self-excusingly.

Herman looks for the monogram.

The gothic letters M. V. B., surrounded with a wreath of forget-me-nots in finest satin-stitch, adorn one corner.

"Myra Vansittart Brandreth." There are not many people who know Mrs. Brandreth's second name, but Herman is one of the few. It is her mother's maiden name. In her girlish days she was rather proud of signing herself in full, Myra Vansittart Clitheroe, with a flourish under the C.

Alphonse receives his two sovereigns, and is glad. However sweet it may have been to him to retain that perfumed souvenir of a charming woman, fifty francs are sweeter. How many breakfasts, how many dinners, cigarettes, games at billiards, are comprehended in such a sum!

Mr. Westray informs his legal adviser that he is quite satisfied now. He has traced the sender of the telegram. There is no shadow of doubt in his mind.

"It is an ugly thing for a woman to have done," says the lawyer, with a shrug.

Herman remembers a certain Sunday evening in Bloomsbury-square, and a famous couplet of Congreve's:

"Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turn'd,
And hell no fury like a woman scorn'd."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

“O crueller than was ever told in tale
 Or sung in song! O vainly lavish'd love!
 O cruel! There was nothing wild or strange,
 Or seeming shameful—for what shame in love,
 So love be true, and not as yours is?—nothing
 Poor Vivien had not done to win his trust,
 Who call'd her what he called her—all her crime,
 All, all, the wish to prove him wholly hers.”

“Left her in her tears, and dried not one of them with his comfort.”

“CURIOUS to have refused a coronet,” muses Mrs. Brandreth, letting Cadol's latest novel, in a pink cover, fall open in her lap. Her mind is too full to find room for the shadows of fiction, be they never so life-like, or psychologically true to the worst side of human nature. She reads page after page mechanically, with the eyes only, and finally abandons the book altogether. “Who would believe it of me,” she asks herself; “of me, who seem such a worldling? And it would have been something to be called Lady Earlswood, and to have prime ministers and foreign plenipotentiaries at my dinner-parties, and to have set the fashion, and had carriages and new geraniums and hats called after me; something to have changed all at once from a player-queen into a real potentate; something won to have no more thought for the future, no need to save money, and bethink myself that age and gray hairs must come; something to know that I should wear purple till it served for my pall. Yet I can surrender this gladly, proudly, for the sweeter gain I have played for so boldly.”

She recalls those Sunday evenings that Herman and she have spent, almost *en tête-à-tête*, in that exclusive little drawing-room of hers; the amber curtains drooping between them and the outer world. She thinks of hours in which it has seemed to her that the old love has come back, the old days have been renewed, youth and hope born again, life's afternoon flushed and brightened with the morning's rose-colour.

“I suit him best,” she thinks. “I can share in his work; I can help his ambition. Nature and art have made us for each other, he and I, while that poor petty fool has not a thought in common with him.”

Yes, for this hope—for the hope of seeing Herman at her feet—she willingly foregoes wealth and status; willingly as she has sacrificed honour, honesty, womanly feeling for the same end. And it must be said in her favour that of the two this latter sacrifice costs her least.

She has seen no English newspaper since her arrival at Helldenburg, just a week ago, and she does not know that Hamilton

Lyndhurst has journeyed to a country not included in modern atlases, or described by the useful Murray, and to which the indefatigable Cook "personally conducts" no excursionists.

Lord Earlswood comes in and out two or three times in a day, and she tolerates his presence with a little more than her usual civility, feeling grateful for that offer of his. It is something to fall back upon at the worst—a *pis-aller*. If love fail her, despite her desperate endeavour to lure him back to her net, Plutus will yet be propitious. She will not have lived in vain.

"I will console myself by spending more money than any peeress in London, and in shutting my doors against some of the best people in Burke. My rooms shall be more exclusive than Almack's in the famous Jersey and Londonderry days, and I will refuse to receive duchesses if they are not the fashion."

"But love is best—love is best of all," she thinks, after a brief indulgence in that splendid vision. "What good can I have more out of society than I have had, upon a small scale? It will be only widening the area. Love is best. O, for the old Devonshire lanes, and the blue sea shining at us across a break in the woods! O, for long summer afternoons far away from this idle world, with the man I love!"

She thinks of the day when he held her hand in his among the foxgloves and the fern, and told her that she was all the world to him. They have travelled their diverse roads in life since then. Could they but come back to that old trysting-place, and have faith in each other as of old, and begin the world again—yes, that would be verily the dawn of a new life.

Whereupon, as she is dreaming of such a return, with eyes fixed on the western glow yonder above the sea line, enters Lord Earlswood, carrying his hat and cane as if they were the two parts of a musical instrument, from which he was prepared to extract melody. He unships his cane, ships it again under his left arm, and takes Mrs. Brandreth's hand, which he clings to with a limp affectionateness for some moments.

"So good of you to let me drop in like this," he says.

If Myra aspired to candour, she would reply that she suffers the infliction because she cannot help herself. But she inwardly resolves to leave Heldenburg speedily. In Kensington Gore Lord Earlswood is one of many, and his society so much the less a burden.

"Why don't you come out on the digue?" he asks. "It's very nice. Lot's of people."

"If there were no people, I'd come; but I hate being stared at. And I daresay somebody would contrive to identify me, thanks to the photographers."

"Sure to," replies his lordship. "They have it in the papers already."

"What?"

"Your name. There's a horrid little local paper—flabby, and smelling of printer's ink. They fasten it on to a stick in the cafés to keep it from dropping to pieces, it's such a flaccid invertebrate creature."

"Well?"

"There's a paragraph about you. I bought a paper on purpose to show you." His lordship produces the limp journal and reads: "We have been pleased to observe the charming English actress, Miss Brandworth—call you Miss and got your name wrong—has taken an apartment in one of the new houses on the esplanade. Another proof that Heldenburg is advancing in popularity. These insulars have heard of us in their barbaric climate, where we are assured there is but one fashionable watering-place—Brighton in the New Forest. For invalids they have, it is true, their Isle of Wights, with its pretty town of Scarborough, and its adjacent islets of Dogs and Mans."

Mrs. Brandreth laughs faintly, and seems not over-pleased that the local print should have made known her presence.

"O, by-the-bye," exclaims Lord Earlswood, after a longish silence, during which he has performed dumbly with his cane on the crown of his hat, with as intent a countenance as if he were carefully executing one of Chopin's most elaborate compositions in seven flats, relieved by occasional double sharps, "I've got some news for you."

His lordship's idea of a brilliant conversationalist is that he should be the first to communicate some startling event, calamitous or otherwise, no matter how uninteresting to the recipient—a fire in Blackfriars or Ratcliff Highway, a glazier fallen through a skylight, the failure of a bank, or a play, or a picture. If the event, on the other hand, has any point of special interest to the listener, the conversationalist scores double.

Myra has been watching the evening sky dreamily, not quite awakened from that dream in which Lord Earlswood surprised her. She turns to him languidly.

"You are a great purveyor of marvels," she remarks. "What is the last startling event? Not Westminster Abbey burnt down, I hope, or the Emperor of Russia assassinated?"

"No. It's something stranger than that—about somebody you know," replies Lord Earlswood, with unction.

Myra's attention is keen enough now. Her small world—that inner world, that universe in little which each of us carries in his breast—holds but one person. Her first thought is of him.

"Who is it?" she asks impatiently. "I know so many people."

"Yes, but this is a particular friend—used to meet him always at your Sunday evenings."

"Can't you say whom you are talking about?" exclaims Myra, her breath coming quicker.

"Hamilton Lyndhurst. Clever fellow, but not quite—in short, you know, a bad egg—a very speckly potato."

Myra grows suddenly pale, and looks at Lord Earlswood strangely—with a look of absolute fear, he thinks. He suspects all at once that Lyndhurst has been his rival, and not Westray; and a faint light kindles in his dull gray eyes.

"What of Mr. Lyndhurst?" asks Myra breathlessly.

"O, nothing out of the common, poor fellow. Dead!"

This is more awful than anything she could have feared. Dead! The keystone of the arch gone—all the fabric fallen into ruin, perhaps.

Her head sinks back upon the cushion of her chair; her dry lips move dumbly. She looks as if she were going to faint.

"I didn't know the news would be such a floorer," says Lord Earlswood drily, with a suppressed savagery. "If I had known, I should have been more careful how I told you. I would have gone to that white-washed convent outside the town and got one of the sisters to break it to you."

"Don't be idiotic!" exclaims Myra contemptuously. "Mr. Lyndhurst was no more to me than the next stranger who passes by on the pavement below. But it is awful to hear of such a sudden death—a man I saw last strong, vigorous, full of plans for the future."

She recalls that conversation in her dressing-room at the Frivolity, and Hamilton Lyndhurst's excuse for his evil life. Death was always at his shoulder.

"Yes," says Lord Earlswood, "it's very horrid that a man can be taken off like that. Makes long invitations for dinner-parties and speculative bets on next year's races quite a mockery, doesn't it? You may stand to win a pot of money on the Guineas or the Cup, and the beggar who gave you the odds goes off the hooks like this. Lyndhurst is in my book for ever so many events."

"How did he die?" asks Myra, who has not heard a word of this lament.

She has a horrible idea that Herman and Lyndhurst may have met, and that Lyndhurst's death may have been the issue of their meeting. She sees herself for an instant—with all the vividness of an overpowering apprehension—the instigator and cause of a murder.

"Heart-disease," drawls his lordship. "There has been a good deal of talk about it at Ostend. I ran over there this morning, and heard the news at the public rooms. Westray and his wife were with him when he died, it seems, at an hotel in Ostend. Horrid to die at a strange hotel, with none of one's traps about one. He hadn't even a servant, it seems. Dreadfully benighted state."

Myra lapses into silence—deepest gloom depicted in her face.

"You must have been awfully friendly with him to feel his death so much," says Lord Earlswood, moodily jealous.

"Don't I tell you that his death is nothing to me? One man less in the world, that is all. Did you hear anything more? Did people say anything about the circumstances attending his death?"

"Nothing particular. It was very sudden—dropped down senseless, and never spoke again. Doctors called it heart-disease. There was a post-mortem, you know; everything *en règle*."

"There was no scandal—no insinuation against Mrs. Westray's character? No question as to how she came to be with him?"

"Of course not. There was her husband with her, you see; and a husband is supposed to be a kind of protector. I don't mean to say that he always is, you know; but society accepts him in that light."

"When did this happen?"

"Nearly a week ago. Poor Lyndhurst was to be buried this afternoon. Very quiet funeral—all over by this time. Melancholy consequence of one's death, isn't it? I wouldn't so much mind dying if it wasn't for the burying process. If I could be allowed to lie about somewhere out of people's way, or be deodorised like sewage, and turned to some use agriculturally, or stuck up at the top of a high tower and pecked at by birds till there was nothing left of me but nice clean bones. There's nothing objectionable in bones, you know. Yes, they've buried poor Lyndhurst in a horrid foreign cemetery, where people stick twopenny gilt vases on the graves, and paper flowers."

"Hark! what is that?" cries Myra, starting up.

A shrill peal of the bell belonging to this first-floor. A visitor for Mrs. Brandreth.

"I don't know a soul here except you," she says, more discomposed by the interruption than she need be, Lord Earlswood thinks, always inclined to suspicion.

Her maid is heard in converse with some one in the little ante-room. These new houses are mere lath and plaster, and one hears so well. A man's voice. Great Heaven, whose? Her heart beats as if it would burst. Yes, it is the voice she knows so well. The door opens, and Herman enters, pale in the twilight, and with an inflexible look in brow and eyes and lips.

"Good heavens, Herman, what is the matter?" she cries, calling him by the dear familiar name which she has spoken so often when they were children.

"Not very much," he answers quietly. "A mere trifle, in fact. I have come all the way from Ostend to bring you this.

He takes the lace-bordered handkerchief from his breast-pocket, and hands it to her.

"You still use your favourite wood-violet, I find," he says, as he gives her the perfumed cambric.

She looks at him with a stony stare—half bewilderment, half alarm. Has he gone out of his mind? Has some horror connected with Lyndhurst's death driven him mad? This is a deeper ruin than she dreamed of.

"Herman!"

"You are surprised," he says. "You don't remember, perhaps, where you dropped that handkerchief?"

"No," she answers mechanically, still looking at him with the same blank terror in her face.

"I wonder that so clever a woman as you, engaged in such an ugly business, should have left any trace of your presence. That handkerchief was found in the telegraph office at Ostend a week ago."

"Indeed! Yes, I had to send a telegram to my acting manager," replies Myra, with composure. She knows now why he is here, and that all is discovered. The utmost she can attempt now is denial.

"You were not telegraphing to him when you dropped that handkerchief," says Herman. "You were assisting—or perhaps I should say instigating—Mr. Lyndhurst to send a lying telegram to my wife; a telegram affecting to come from me, her husband, stricken down by sudden illness, summoning her to my sick-bed. She was to come and find Mr. Lyndhurst there to meet her. A pretty scheme, was it not—one woman trying to compass the destruction of another—a womanly revenge upon an unconscious rival?"

"You forget that we are not alone!" cries Myra.

"I do not. I believe Lord Earlswood to be as much interested in knowing your part in this business as I am."

"Thank you," says his lordship, who stands holding on to the back of a chair, very pale, and with his eyes on Myra's face.

"Thank you, Westray. That's friendly, at any rate."

"I don't know how you came by this notion," says Myra. "I have not seen Mr. Lyndhurst since I left London."

"Don't trouble yourself to tell lies on my account," interposes Lord Earlswood. "I can see the truth in your face."

"On your account!" cries Myra, with biting scorn. "Do you think I am trying to justify myself in your eyes? Herman, will you listen to me?"

"Only when you tell me the black and bitter truth. What could have induced you to mix yourself in this abominable scheme—you, my seeming friend?"

"Friend—yes, your friend," Myra murmurs with white lips.

"What can have transformed you—you whom I remember ten years ago candid and fresh and innocent? You, the daughter of a gentleman and a soldier. What can have tempted you to become—the name is too vile; I cannot utter it."

"What has transformed me!" echoes Myra, confronting him desperately, all thought of escape abandoned, despair and passion overwhelming every instinct of self-preservation. "What! Do you pretend not to know; you who tempted me; you who have seemed so happy at my side—at my feet almost—all through the summer that is gone? You ask me that—you who have left your wife to solitude, or baby-worship, and given me the first-fruits of your wit and wisdom, all your golden leisure; you who have made your art a pretext to be happy with me; you who have suffered me to think that the old love has come back to life? And now you dare to ask me what tempted me! You, and you only; my love for you, which is stronger than myself; my hope of loosening the bond between you and your foolish wife. Yes, I avow it; I am that vile thing your lips refuse to name. I egged on Lyndhurst in his pursuit of your wife; I suggested the telegram which was to bring her to Ostend and blast her reputation, and give you ground for a divorce. If my scheme had prospered, you would have been a free man, and would have come back to me. A nine days' wonder, a newspaper report, and you and I would have been free to begin a new life, all the world before us—fame, and hope, and the old love made young again."

"Do you think I should have come back to you?" asks Herman, with deliberate contempt. "Do you think—even if I had been caught in your trap, and had believed my wife what you would have had me believe her—do you think I should have brought my wounded heart to you for comfort—to you, who live before the lights, and are falser off the stage than on it; to you, who believe in no God, fear no devil? No, Mrs. Brandreth; you are a charming companion for a dull Sunday afternoon, an admirable hostess, an artist of the highest flight, but to share a man's hopes, to lift his soul above this sordid earth, is not your *métier*. I did not believe that it was in you to grovel in a moral gutter, even for the indulgence of a cherished caprice, which you honour yourself and me too much by calling love. I am sorry that Colonel Clitheroe's daughter should have fallen so low. For the rest, I am happy to tell you that my wife and I were never more united than we are at this moment, and that the prospect of our married life never seemed brighter to us than it seems to-day."

She tries to answer him, facing him defiantly, erect, drawn to her fullest height, like a martyr at the stake; but the pale lips move tremulously and make no sound. Her throat is parched; words will not come at her bidding. Her brain clouds; she feels as if this were the first warning of some awful seizure.

Herman turns on his heel and leaves the room without another word. Lord Earlswood, brushing his hat assiduously with his pale gray glove, slowly follows.

"What!" she says, with a laugh, such a curious laugh, "are you going too? You know all now; you know how foolish I have been, and who was your only rival. But I am cured now; I have had my lesson."

It flashes upon her bewildered brain that after all there is one resource still left her. Love is a sealed book evermore, a sepulchre that holds only the ashes of dead hopes; but ambition remains. She may be a peeress—the fashion. She may have place and power, and diamonds and palaces, and all those good things for which other women are ready to sell their souls. She has ventured hers on a more foolish game, and, lo, her reward! This poor Earlswood will have been disconcerted, no doubt, by Herman's disclosures—cruel, heartless, iniquitous, from lips she has worshipped. But he is so soft and slavish a creature, and so blindly adores her, she does not fear the issue.

He turns at her voice, and pauses on the threshold, but does not come back to her—not by so much as a step. She wonders to see him stand there immovable, looking down with an embarrassed air, and still engaged in smoothing that hat of his—the most perfect thing in hats; with the very curve affected by princes.

"You say you have had your lesson," he says slowly. "I don't think you can need any commentary upon it from me. I am rather an easy-going kind of fellow in a general way—not shocked at a trifle. I don't expect women to be perfect, or the essence of truth even. But there *is* a line; you have overstepped it. Good evening."

He is gone, and she knows that it is for ever. Love and ambition have gone out of the door together, and left her lonely.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"'Who calleth thee, Heart? World's Strife,
With a golden heft to his knife;
World's Mirth, with a finger fine
That draws on a board in wine
Her blood-red plans of life;
World's Gain, with a brow knit down;
World's Fame, with a laurel crown
Which rustles most as the leaves turn brown:
Heart, wilt thou go?'"

'No, no!

Calm hearts are wiser so.'"

HERMAN goes back to London and faces his difficulties boldly. His creditors—tailor, bootmaker, bookseller, frame-maker, corn-chandler, wine-merchant, and the rest of them—would be easy enough to deal with, but the bill of sale is in the grip of a relentless usurer, and there is nothing but to make a clean sweep of things, and see the pretty rooms at Fulham pulled to pieces: the

Pompeian dining-room, the Dutch drawing-room brought piecemeal to the hammer; the graceful draperies folded into unsightly bundles; the Sèvres and majolica and terra-cotta and bronze, the old Moscow China and modern Minton all jumbled together upon a kitchen table and disfigured with lot numbers; to see grimy brokers banded together in their villainous "knock-out," and to know that his goods stand in danger of being disposed of for less than their value. All this Herman endures, and attends the sale bravely in order to secure sundry trifles which he knows Editha especially cherishes. He contrives, with friendly help from his publisher, to rescue the Squire's wedding gift, that old silver which has been in the Morcombe family for a century and a half.

Everybody is very good to him. It seems to him that the world is not such a bad world after all, even for a man under a cloud, albeit he has so heartily abused it in occasional fits of spleen. All his old friends rally round him; and for the new ones, those who have come to his house out of curiosity, and affected his society because he was the fashion?—well, he can afford to lose the few flimsy acquaintances who fall away in the hour of need. It is but a winnowing of the chaff from the corn. He remembers what Coleridge says of such—

"If a foe have kenn'd,
Or worse than foe, an alienated friend,
A rib of dry rot in thy ship's stout side,
Think it God's message, and in humble pride
With heart of oak replace it; thine the gains—
Give him the rotten timber for his pains."

He takes a couple of rooms in Bloomsbury, where he can work for a few quiet hours every night while he is engaged during the day in the adjustment of his affairs. He examines his stock in trade and finds himself not badly off. There is that comedy planned for the most part in Mrs. Brandreth's drawing-room, two acts of which are completed and set up in type. He has also a novel half-finished. He determines to finish the play before he leaves London, and if possible to plant it advantageously. There will hardly be any difficulty about this; for his name is allied with the success of the Frivolity Theatre, and he will be gladly welcomed at any comedy house in London.

For his novel, how sweet to finish it in the rustic quiet of Lochwithian, to read his story aloud to Editha, chapter by chapter, to subordinate his style to her refining taste, to think and dream over his work before he gives it to the world as he has been unable to think or dream in the fever of metropolitan life, amidst the distractions of clubs and dinner-parties! He writes to his wife almost every day, if only a few lines, and his letters, however brief, are full of love and gladness. He writes like a lover for whom wedded life is yet to begin.

Editha's letters, save upon the subject of Ruth's failing health declining day by day, are cheering. The Squire has taken the tidings of his son-in-law's ruin more patiently than his daughter could have hoped, and has expressed no surprise at the fact.

"I expected it all along," he has said, after a few feeble groans. "What else can one look for from a man who writes books? You can't suppose that such a man will be practical or business-like, or keep an eye upon pounds, shillings, and pence. His ideas are all up in the skies. I wonder such men walk straight, and don't get run over. No, I am not surprised, Editha. I'm sorry for you, of course, but you must have expected as much when you married him. And poor Hetheridge ready to make you mistress of as fine an estate as you could see in a day's ride. A practical man too; not a better farmer in all Brecknockshire."

The Squire, having moaned his moan, is kind, but does not offer substantial aid, finding the daily calls upon his income quite as much as he can satisfy. There is a home for Herman and his wife at the Priory, he tells Editha, as long as they like to stay there; but Editha knows that dependence of this kind would not suit her husband's temper, and her thoughts are of the cottage yonder on the slope of the hill.

She and Ruth have long and confidential talks about the future of this prodigal couple in those happier days when Ruth is at her best, and fear gives way to hope for a little while. Dr. Davis, good-natured little man, has pronounced no sentence of doom. He comes and goes in his quiet way, and is attentive and watchful, and enjoins especial care of the invalid as the autumn days grow shorter and colder; but he tells no one that which he knows too well: that all that is earthly in Ruth Morcombe is fading fast, like summer's last roses by the fountain yonder; that while the spirit brightens day by day its mortal tabernacle as surely decays. He leaves them as long as he can the respite of uncertainty.

"If we could only set up housekeeping again in that picturesque cottage!" sighs Editha, sitting in her favourite attitude by Ruth's pillow, Herman's last letter in her lap.

"And why not, darling?" asks Ruth, with her glorified smile.

"Well, dear, there is the question of furniture; however simple, you know, it must cost money. There are such innumerable items—mattresses and coal-scuttles and saucepans and door-mats—that hardly come into one's idea of a house; but they must be had all the same. One couldn't get on for a day without a flour-dredger, and one's whole system of housekeeping would break down if one forgot to buy a cruet-stand. I always envy our cottagers, beginning with a bedstead and bedding, a few chairs and a table, half a dozen cups and saucers and plates

bought of a travelling hawker, and just enough hardware to cook a dinner of bacon and cabbage. But if we were ever so poor, Herman would expect his dinner-table to be just as well arranged as at his club. He would be content with claret at eighteenpence a bottle, but he would not drink it out of a clumsy glass. However, we must rub on in furnished lodgings for a year or so, not far from here, dearest—at Llandrysak, perhaps—till Herman has earned enough to furnish a new home. I will take care there shall be no extravagance this time, no long bill from a fashionable upholsterer to burst upon us like a bomb-shell some morning.”

“Darling, why should you wait?” asks Ruth, in that sweet serious voice of hers—so low yet so clear, so gently persuasive. “I know your heart is longing for that house on the hillside, and for the pleasure of furnishing a new home after your own simple taste. Why should it not be done at once? All that I have is yours: it is only a question of now or later.”

“Ruth!” exclaims Editha, with a piteous little cry.

“Dearest, we know what must be soon, though we do not speak of it. We are in the hands of the All-Wise. It is not loss or sorrow coming upon us, only a brief parting. My pet, why do you cry like that, when you see how happy I am, knowing that you are beloved, that all that was amiss in your life is set right? Let us talk of your new house, dear. It must be got ready at once. I have five hundred pounds in the bank that will just do to buy furniture. You shall go to Shrewsbury with papa and choose the things. Indeed, love, I have no use for the money; it is only lying idle. I gave papa a new steam-plough on his last birthday, and made him happy. I shall have my dividends again before his next birthday, if God spares me so long, and can give him something more for his farm.”

“Ruth, you are too good, too generous. I accept your gift gratefully, gladly: there never could be any sense of obligation between you and me.”

It is all settled. Next morning's post brings Editha a long letter from Herman, telling her that the sale is over; that their goods and chattels realised a fair price on the whole, despite the knockers-out.

“A few good fellows of my acquaintance ventilated the things at the clubs, dear,” writes Herman cheerily—“said I was going to live in Wales, on your estate, and that if people wanted to see æsthetic chairs and tables they had better have a look at my villa. So a lot of notoriety-mongers came down and bought coffee-tables and bronzes and teacups that had belonged to the popular dramatist. One poor old lady in dyed hair fought hard for your work-table, but I would have sacrificed a year's income on the spot rather than let it go. You will be pleased to hear that I have secured most of your favourite objects: the little

Copenhagen *déjeuner* you used for afternoon tea, your easy-chair, your pet-chromos, the bronze Psyche you used to admire, and various trifles for which you had an affection. The Squire's wedding-gift—Paul Lemery's silver—is snugly reposing at the Union Bank. So ruin has spared us a few odd spars from the wreck."

This letter gladdens Editha's heart; for it assures her that his home has been dear to Herman, and that its relics are sacred. She writes him an answer full of gratitude. It is more than kind of him to have remembered her likings and fancies in the midst of his troubles. She is quite hopeful about the future, she tells him, but says not a word of Ruth's generosity or of a new home. She winds up by asking him how soon he will be able to come down to the Priory, but adds, with gentle self-abnegation, that he must take his own time in settling his affairs and finishing the play he has told her about, and not wear himself out by too rapid work.

The truth underlying this wifely injunction is that Editha—fondly as she longs for the hour of reunion—has business of importance to get through before that hour comes. She and Ruth talk over their plans together like a pair of conspirators, and are as earnest and mysterious as if they were hatching treason.

Herman toils on with indomitable energy. He finishes his play—a comedy of the Sardou school, with a vein of strong domestic interest—finishes it to his own satisfaction. In these desperate crises of life a man seems to work with more than his normal strength, there is a force and fire engendered of stern necessity. He offers the piece to a West-end manager, and his offer is received with rapture. The leading actress is enchanted at the idea of playing a part intended for Mrs. Brandreth. Herman has confessed frankly that the piece was planned for the Frivolity, but that he has changed his mind about it.

"Some disagreement about terms, I suppose," suggests the manager.

"No; I have had no reason to complain of Mrs. Brandreth's liberality," answers Herman, "and I shall be quite satisfied if you give me the same terms. But I thought, as the piece progressed, that the character was—well, hardly suited to her. However, you had better read the piece, and see if you would like to produce it."

"A work of supererogation," says the manager. "I feel convinced it will do. If it is as good as *Kismet*—"

"I venture to hope and believe that it is better than *Kismet*."

The manager reads, and is delighted. Recklessness and dash are the prevailing characteristics of the play, but there is no offence in it. It paints the last follies of modern society; it strikes to the heart of domestic life, and shows the pathetic side of characters which on the surface are broadly comic.

So one dull morning early in November the company of that

famous comedy house, the Pall-Mall, assemble to hear Herman read his play. He is perhaps a shade more nervous than he was last time at the Frivolity, or the time before last; for that strong rock, his self-esteem, has been shaken, though not overthrown. It trembles on its basis like the famous Logan rock, on the wild Cornish shore, but the basis is sound enough, all the same. Herman feels that success is more vital to him just now than it has ever been. He is beginning a new career. He has fortune to win—a new name to create. He has worked hard and honestly at this last play, with a dogged determination to do his uttermost. He has a feeling that it must be a startling success or a stupendous failure. There will be no *succès d'estime* this time. And though he thinks of Myra Brandreth the woman with a shudder of utter loathing, he thinks of Mrs. Brandreth the actress with a touch of regret. There is no one like her. She has a finesse, a power of seizing the author's meaning and making the utmost of it, a power of imparting force and depth to the author's language, which startle him—the creator and originator—like a revelation, until he asks himself wonderingly: "Did I ever intend this? Did I see what a great effect I was leading up to here?"

As compared with all other acting Myra's seems inspiration. Miss Delavigne, the leading actress at the Pall-Mall, has vigour and dramatic instinct; a pleasing face; a fine contralto voice, full and round and sweet; dark eyes with a sunny smile in them—and there are so few eyes that smile—but she has not Myra's electric intensity, those looks that seem to burn, those thrilling tones that move her audience to sudden tears before they have time to be ashamed of their weakness.

Herman glances furtively at the circle of strange faces before he begins to read. A grave interest is the predominating expression; but in one or two there is a sour look, a shade of discontent in advance, as much as to say, "I know *my* part will be worth nothing."

He reads—reads as he used to read to Editha in the first year of their married life—reads well too, though he is nervous at starting. Miss Delavigne listens intently; Mr. M'Allister, the light comedian, grins approvingly now and then; Mr. Vickery, the old man, mutters an occasional "Good again," in his quaint voice. The points all tell. Yes, Herman feels that, so far at least, his piece is safe. Never has he been so anxious. He wipes his damp forehead when the last act is finished, and feels as if he were the veriest tyro, and had been reading his first attempt.

This business settled, he is free to go down to Lochwithian, and he loses not an hour before starting.

The horror of those three days at Ostend has taught him how much he loves his wife, how needful her love and truth are to his peace—better than their two years of tranquil wedded happiness.

He has believed her lost to him, and has measured her worth by the blankness of his life without her.

Happy November day which sees him pacing the picturesque old streets of Shrewsbury, during the hour's delay unavoidable at the break in his journey. Happy day, light and bright and pleasant, though a drizzling rain falls fast all the while, and Shrewsbury's flagstones are sloppy. He treads as lightly, and feels as airy and irresponsible a creature, as a schoolboy going home for the holidays. He does not even envy the Shrewsbury boys, once famous for winning big prizes at the universities, as they come whooping out of the grave old gothic school. He envies nobody to-day. He is hastening to Editha; he is able to tell her that his new comedy is to be played six weeks hence at the Pall-Mall; that his debts are paid; that he is to have a thousand pounds down on the nail for his new novel, and a half share in all profits accruing from the sale of all editions thereof after the first six months. He will stay at the Priory for two or three weeks while he and Editha are deliberating as to where they shall pitch their tent, temporarily, in a furnished house or in lodgings. But to take up his abode in another man's house—even his father-in-law's—for any length of time is not to be thought of. He has made up his mind, virtuously, to live wherever Editha likes in future. All places are within easy reach of London nowadays. It is only a question of an hour or two more or less in a railway carriage. To live in the Lake district in Southey's time, when a journey to London and back meant a week in a stifling incommodious stage-coach, must have been absolute exile from the metropolis; and yet these poets seem to have dwelt among the lakes and mountains for sheer pleasure. And why should not he, for Editha's dear sake, reconcile himself to a perpetual prospect of hills and woods, blue sky and rose-garden? The streets would seem so much the more delightful when he did go to London. And again, of distinction in living thus remote, a being apart from the vulgar throng. Tennyson in the Isle of Wight, Hugo at Guernsey, Madame Sand at Nohant: yes, great intellects are fond of solitude. To be dependent upon a literary club for one's ideas, to find one's inspiration in Hyde Park, is to acknowledge one's self a poor creature.

The train stops at Llandrysak station. No one to watch its arrival to-day. Llandrysak looks like a settlement that has gone to sleep; the hotels are empty and desolate. The common is a gray waste under a sunless sky. The rain has ceased, but there is an all-pervading dampness. The solitary porter at the station is dumfounded at sight of a passenger. His brother in portorage has been knocked off for the winter, and this one's post is all but a sinecure. He devotes himself chiefly

to agriculture on strips of kitchen-garden that border the line.

"But you belong somewhere hereabouts, don't you, sir?" he inquires of Herman, anxious to account for the phenomenon of his appearance.

"Yes; I am going to Lochwithian Priory."

"Yes, indeed, sir. I thought I knew your face. Strangers don't often come this way in winter. Shall I take your portmanteau down to the Priory, sir?" as if it were a matter of half a mile or so.

"If you like to earn a couple of shillings that way, you can; or I can send one of the Priory men for it."

"I'll take it, sir."

Herman has not written to announce his coming. He wants to surprise Editha, and even the idea of an eight-mile walk does not appal him. The clear sweet air inspires him like a draught of nectar. It is like entering a new world with a new atmosphere after London smoke and fog. "Yes, the country is very nice for a change," Herman thinks, patronising the prospect, as he looks along the winding road. The calm gray hills are half veiled in silvery mist, the fir-trees by the quarry yonder stand out darkly against a soft gray sky.

"These are the scenes she loves," he tells himself, and he has a friendly feeling for the autumnal landscape, with its subdued colouring and sober light.

It is a long walk for a man accustomed to London paving-stones and hansom cabs; but Herman's step is light and quick to-day. He was never in better spirits; never, in the first bloom and freshness of his courtship, did he hasten more gladly to the woman he loves. That play at the Pall-Mall will be a success, he feels sure; and his book—he is free to meditate upon that now, and happy thoughts crowd upon him as he walks briskly along that lonely road—going a mile at a stretch sometimes without meeting a human creature; up hill and down dale, by open common and high-wooded banks, with hills, hills, hills, circling the landscape always; now far off, now near; some of them so gray and distant that they are like shadows of hills faintly defined against a shadowy sky.

He sees the happy valley at last lying below him, steep heathery hills guarding it like giant watch-towers, the gray stones of the ruined Priory showing against the soddened grass. A turn in the road, and the new Priory—the good old Tudor dwelling-house, with its clusters of red-brick chimneys, its stone-mullioned windows—looks down upon him from its elevated position above shrubberied banks and sloping lawns, and the thicket where the young larches shine silvery white in the spring time, and where a few scarlet berries still linger on the mountain ashes, and the last tawny leaves on the young oaks.

How quiet the old house looks on this still autumn day ; not a leaf stirring. But for that gray smoke curling slowly upward, it might be a house in a picture.

Great heaven, the blinds are all down ! The church-bell begins to toll dismally. There is some one dead.

Herman stops as if he were turned to stone, and clings to the gate as he counts the strokes of that iron tongue.

CHAPTER XL.

"'Twas but just now she went away—
I have not since had time to shed a tear ;
And yet the distance does the same appear,
As if she had been a thousand years from me.
Time takes no measure in eternity."
* * * *

"Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is
Fill'd by dead eyes too tender to know change ?
That's hardest."

SEVEN-AND-TWENTY times tolls the bell, telling the age of that departed one for whom it lifts up its iron lamentation. Seven-and-twenty years of age, and Editha is only twenty-three.

"Thank God, thank God !" cries Herman. But while the bell has been tolling, he has endured an agony greater than that undisciplined heart of his has ever known before.

He breathes again, and still pauses at the gate wondering. He looks down the little village street, a street of about fifteen houses, and sees that all the windows are darkened. A woman comes to her door with a broom, and sweeps the threshold with a depressed air. Herman goes across the road to question her. He has not the heart to enter the Priory just yet.

"Who is dead ?" he asks.

"Miss Morcombe, sir ; the Squire's eldest daughter and our true friend. She died two hours ago. There isn't a man, woman, or child within hearing of that bell that hasn't loved her and been the better for her kindness. It's a dark day for Lochwithian."

"It must have been very sudden," says Herman.

Editha's letters have told him of Ruth's feeble state, but have been hopeful about her notwithstanding.

"Yes, sir ; it was cruelly sudden. We knew that she was weakly. Dr. Davis has been to see her every day for a long time, and he has shook his head sometimes when he has been asked about her. But the end came very sudden all the same. Poor Miss Editha—I beg pardon, sir, Mrs. Westray—it's an awful blow for her. But I'm right down glad you've come."

Herman is glad too, even in the midst of his sorrow. It is something to be here to comfort his darling in this the sharpest trial that has ever come upon her. He goes slowly up to the house,

sees one of the old servants, whose eyelids are swollen with weeping.

"O sir, I am so glad you have come! Poor Miss Editha!"

They call her thus still at the Priory at odd times.

"Will you tell her that I am here? or can I go to her?"

"She is up-stairs, sir, in Miss Morcombe's room. Mr. Petherick is with her, I think."

"And the Squire?"

"Poor dear gentleman, he's almost distracted. He has shut himself up in his study, and won't see anybody. It came upon him so sudden, you see, sir. Our dear young lady took a turn for the worse yesterday afternoon, and at daybreak this morning she began to sink."

Herman goes up to that white-and-green morning-room he knows so well, the place in which he has spent so many an hour of tranquil happiness. The room opening out of this is the death-chamber. Editha is prostrate on the sofa—Ruth's sofa—her face buried in the silken pillow, sobbing piteously. Good Parson Petherick sits beside her, his hand on her shoulder, his face very pale, and with a look of pain that alters it strangely. At sight of Herman he rises, and resigns his place to the husband.

"This is well-timed," he whispers. "She has sore need of comfort. This loss falls heavy upon all of us."

"Darling, I am here to share your grief," Herman says gently.

Editha starts and trembles at the sound of his voice, then raises herself from the sofa and falls sobbing upon his breast.

"O Herman, I have lost her—the dearest, the best, and truest. There is none like her. Love me, dear, love me with all your heart. I have only you now."

"My dearest, you have had the first place in my heart always, from the first time we met. You have been loved with all my heart; you shall be, while that heart beats. My own one, be comforted. Your sister was like an angel while she was with us; she is with the angels now."

Hard for a man to say these things who believes in very little, to whom the angelic host are a semi-mythical people popularised by Milton and the Italian painters. But it may be that before the mystery of death even the sceptic believes and trembles.

"Yes. She has only gone from me a few hours, yet I think of her among the company of angels. I have but to close my eyes, and I can see her in that angelic throng. They turn their shining faces towards me, full of pity, and hers is the brightest of all. It is selfish to regret her, selfish sorrow that tears at my heart; but she was so dear—my comforter, my guide, my second self!"

"Dearest, I will try to fill her vacant place; grief shall draw us nearer together. I have been careless, neglectful, self-seeking; but I have never been unfaithful in thought or word or wish.

My love has never been lessened. It has grown and strengthened with the progress of our wedded life."

Mr. Petherick has left them. They are alone together; but their tones are hushed and low, subdued to reverence by that solemn presence in the adjoining room. Herman tempts his wife out into the garden by-and-by in the winter dusk, and they walk by the beds where late autumn flowers are fading and by the fountain where they sat together as strangers three years ago. Editha tells her husband about Ruth's illness and that sudden change which heralded death, and there is a melancholy comfort in talking of these things.

"It was such a peaceful end, Herman. O, may death come to us like that, with a smile of welcome!"

* * * * *

It is afternoon on the day of the funeral. Ruth has been laid in her quiet resting-place. The simple people who have loved her have come from far and near—some who have only known her sweetness from hearsay, but have been not the less the recipients of her bounty. All is over. The weeping crowd has dispersed; the Priory windows let in the cold gray light upon rooms that seem desolate, though *she* rarely entered them.

Her will is read to the little circle—father, sister, Herman, Mr. Petherick, and the faithful old upper servants. How loving, how thoughtful of those she loves, is the disposal of her small property! It is only two hundred a-year she has to deal with, yet she remembers every one.

She leaves her capital in trust, making Mr. Petherick and Herman joint trustees. Fifty pounds a year is to be paid the Squire for his life, "so that my dear father may buy something for his home-farm, and think it is a birthday present from his loving daughter." This fifty pounds is to revert to Editha at the Squire's death. A hundred a year is left to Editha unconditionally. The remaining fifty is also left to Editha, for half-yearly distribution among certain pensioners whose names are duly set down.

To each of the old servants Ruth bequeaths some token of her love: to one her wardrobe, to another her watch, to others small sums of money. To Herman and Mr. Petherick she leaves her library, to be equally divided; to Editha the harmonium and many small objects of art which she has purchased from time to time.

After the reading of the will Herman and his wife stroll out into the garden and along the road, where the dusk is thickening.

They have talked of their beloved dead and of little else since Herman's coming. It is as if they had been living in some strange semi-spiritual world—a border-land between life and death. The landscape has an unsubstantial air to Herman's fancy in the sombre light.

"Is she not good, Herman—thoughtful, tender, loving?" asks Editha, pondering upon Ruth's will.

"She is all that the pure-minded and perfect are, dearest; a woman without thought of self; and her sister is like her."

They speak of their dead in the present tense still.

"And now, love, let us talk of our future," says Herman, anxious to divert his wife's mind from that one object on which she has brooded for the last six days and nights. "We have the whole business of life to settle: a home to find, a nursery for baby, a coach-house for baby's perambulator. We cannot stay with the Squire for ever, you know: a whole family—husband and wife and baby and nurse. It is too much for paternal affection."

"Papa would be glad to have us for the rest of our lives, Herman."

"My dearest, it would be death to my manhood. I should fold my hands and sit down, like the companions of Ulysses, and meditate for years upon some *magnum opus* never to be written, I should be too lazy to put pen to paper if there were no butcher and baker to be satisfied, if I were never reminded that I have given hostages to Fortune. Who loves work for its own sake? Not I, for sure. Who would not rather lie among the bluebells in the April woods, or ride over the crisp leaves in autumn, than sit at his desk and labour to reduce airy fancies, happy thoughts, vague unfinished dreams into clear and harmonious prose? No, love; we must have a house of our own, and I must see the baker's cart under my window every morning to remind me that I am a bread-winner."

"Then you would much rather we had our own house, Herman?"

"Yes, dear, though it were a hovel, *pourvu* the drainage was decent, and though we lived on bread-and-cheese."

"Yet you were so particular about the dinners at Fulham."

"That is past and gone. At Fulham I was the slave of worldly passions, epicureanism was exacerbated by the knowledge of half a dozen West-end clubs within reach. Your club is the nursery-garden where the weed selfishness grows into a tree big enough to overshadow the land. We will live on bread-and-cheese, darling, with a haunch of Radnorshire mutton on high days and holidays, and a capon from papa's poultry-yard now and then on a Sunday or a birthday. I daresay, if we lived near enough, your father would find us in milk and garden-stuff."

"As if papa would grudge us anything! He has given baby such a beautiful cow, a perfect pet, like Landseer's in the 'Maid and the Magpie.' Would you mind coming a little way farther, Herman? There is a house I should like so much to show you."

This little domestic talk has brightened her. There is more cheerfulness to be extracted from these commonplace subjects sometimes than from all the philosophy of Plato or Bacon.

They turn into a narrower road, that climbs a little way up the base of the hill. Here they find a garden, guarded by a holly-hedge, surrounding a rustic cottage of the Anglo-Swiss type.

Editha lifts the latch, and they go in. The garden is in perfect order. A few late roses linger still on the standards and on the cottage walls. The lawn is like velvet, the gravel-paths carefully rolled.

"Is this the house you talked of, Editha?"

"Yes, dear."

"But you told me it was empty, neglected."

"So it was a month ago. But it has been taken and furnished since then."

"What a pity!"

"Do you think we could have afforded the rent, fifty pounds a year?"

"A bagatelle. Bridge-end House was a hundred-and-twenty."

"But the furniture?"

"Ah, that's a poser; for I am determined to eschew credit. Do you know the new tenants?"

"Intimately."

"How nicely they've done up the place, and what pretty curtains!" exclaims Herman, looking at the cretonne draperies of the drawing-room window.

"Do you think so? I'm so glad," cries Editha, radiant.

Herman looks at her wonderingly; but she runs on before and opens the hall-door, a half-glass door, through which he sees the bright little hall: chromo-lithographs on the pale-green walls, a statuette here and there.

"You may come in, you may look about; I know the tenant quite well. She will not be angry," cries Editha; and her husband follows.

Hand in hand they go from room to room. All is pretty, simple, cottage-like, bright and fresh and innocent as a summer morning. In one of the three bedchambers there is a brazen cot, with white curtains bordered with modern point-lace. The drawing-room chimney-piece has its border of point-lace also, that artistic reproduction of old designs in which Editha excels, by the way.

"Now for the Bluebeard chamber," says Editha, as she pauses at a door on the stairs, and gives Herman a key. "Open it yourself, dear, if you please."

He unlocks the door and goes in, Editha close behind him. This is the largest room of all; the floor stained to resemble oak, and well bee's-waxed; a small Axminster carpet in the centre; a large polished pitch-pine writing-table with many drawers; an easy-chair; a pair of Glastonbury chairs, pitch-pine like the desk; pitch-pine bookshelves from floor to ceiling all round the room; a book-ladder; and in the window, which commands a mighty sweep of hill and valley, Editha's own particular work table, which Herman sent down to the Priory after the sale.

"What does it all mean, Editha? Surely that is your work-table, or I am dreaming."

"It means that this is our house, dear Herman. The furniture is Ruth's last gift. She never took more pleasure in anything earthly than in the furnishing of this house. I would not tell you a word about it in my letters. I wanted to surprise you."

"As if any act of womanly goodness in you or Ruth *could* surprise me," says Herman, clasping her to his heart.

"It was all Ruth's doing," Editha murmurs; "the greatest happiness I looked forward to in this house was to have lived near her, to have seen her every day, and now I am only near her grave."

She keeps back her tears bravely, not willing to spoil Herman's welcome to his new home.

Selina—the faithful Selina, humble friend in the hour of trouble—comes in smiling with a teatray. She is neatly clad in half-mourning, and wears a pretty little mobcap—stupendous concession. But then caps are coming into fashion, and her mistress wears the same coiffure in the morning.

"Isn't that a Fulham face?" asks Herman.

"Yes; I sent for Selina directly the house was ready. She is the best of girls; and I have a Welsh cook who is a pattern of economy. Nurse is going back to town, and Selina and I are going to take care of baby between us. I am not going to ruin you a second time, Herman."

Whereupon Herman Westray protests that in him and not in Editha lay the primal cause of their ruin.

"And are you sure you like the house, dearest?" asks the wife anxiously, as they sip their afternoon tea beside the fire, which burns so brightly on the hearth of home. "Everything is very plain. I was determined to be economical, but I tried to choose artistic-looking things."

"And you have succeeded, dearest. This house looks like the home of an artist."

"See how many bookshelves I have given you. I felt that in the country you would want more books than in town."

"My wisest and best! Yes, I shall turn book-collector. That side for books of reference; that block facing the window for history; a corner for philosophy; a shelf or two for the good old divines with their strong ponderous English; the poets on each side of the fireplace, nearest to hearth and heart."

They sit talking till it is quite dark outside that large square window facing the hills. Selina comes in to ask if they would like candles.

"No, Selina; we must go home to dinner. Shall we come here for good to-morrow, Herman?"

"We cannot come too soon. I'll telegraph to the Pantehnicon for my books; I saved those from the wreck, you know. And now I

want to tell you about my new piece. It is to be played in December."

"At the Frivolity?" asks Editha, with a quiver of pain.

They are in the dark road by this time, arm-in-arm.

"No, dear; I write no more for Mrs. Brandreth. God grant that Mrs. Brandreth and I may never meet again! I told you in one of my letters that I had discovered the sender of that telegram, and begged you to ask me no more till we met."

"Yes, Herman. I obeyed you."

"Mrs. Brandreth was the person who sent it."

"Yes, Herman."

"And Mrs. Brandreth was—"

"The woman who jilted you. I was told that, and I was told that you had never ceased to love her."

"You were told by a liar and a villain, Editha. My heart has never swerved from its devotion to you. I turn my back upon the world I have loved too well without one pang of regret. I look forward to our tranquil life among these hills with unalloyed delight."

CHAPTER XLI.

"The good make a better bargain, and the bad a worse, than is usually supposed; for the rewards of the one, and the punishment of the other, not unfrequently begin on this side of the grave."

THERE is a fatal kind of success which attends the desperate player in life's hazard. Myra Brandreth has lost all—love, hope, self-respect; her prosaic but most faithful adorer, Lord Earlswood, and his following, which made up no inconsiderable part of her circle. The best people were for the most part brought to her Sunday-evening receptions by Lord Earlswood. Now that Lord Earlswood comes to her no longer, these best people drop away. They have an idea that she is not quite the correct person they imagined her, or else why does not Earlswood, whose platonic regard for her in days past was beautiful to see, marry her now that he is a free man?

Society opines that Lord Earlswood has found out something to Mrs. Brandreth's disadvantage. As to what the something may be society speculates ingeniously, and there are various theories.

Society is confirmed in its notion by the sale of the Frivolity Theatre, which Lord Earlswood disposes of to an enterprising stockbroker, who is only too glad to renew Mrs. Brandreth's lease on favourable terms.

Myra has lost all except her art: that stands her in good stead. Herman's promised piece having been withdrawn, she looks about her for something that will startle the town. She will have nothing of the cup-and-saucer comedy school. She wants strong dramatic situations, tragic even—a play that her audience will

dream about. She wants to make such an effect as Rachel made in *Adrienne Lecouvreur*.

Naturally she looks to the French stage for the source of some new play. She goes to Paris and sees a piece which has made itself the talk of that enlightened metropolis, partly from the audacity of subject and treatment, partly from the powerful acting of that lovely comédienne, Madame Finemouche, as the heroine. Even Parisian critics hint that the piece is "tant soit peu hasardée," and recommend that "les jeunes demoiselles, et même les jeunes mariées," should refrain from attending the representation thereof.

"C'est d'une audace magnifique ! Cela va jusqu'au sublime ! On y rencontre des élans d'un véritable génie Dantesque. C'est la corruption dans toute son effrayante nudité exposée aux yeux par le ciseau d'un Michel Ange. C'est d'une desinvolture à faire rougir Belot," and so on, cry the critics in all the notes of the critical scale.

Mrs. Brandreth sees this play, is thrilled with admiration at Madame Finemouche's performance, feels that it is a piece to outrage every English prejudice, to take the town by storm, and draw no end of money, and makes up her mind to do it. She will transfer it to the stage of the Frivolity boldly, nakedly, as it is played in Paris. She will intrust the translation to some experienced dramatist, strong enough to turn brilliant French into sound and forcible English. She sees *L'Ange Déchu* on half a dozen consecutive evenings ; gives her mind to the play absolutely for a whole week ; learns every turn of Finemouche's head, every look, every tone, every phase of agony in the great poisoning scene at the end, where this angel of corruption, *aux abois*, poisons herself, after having tried, more or less vainly, to poison her rival, her husband, and one or two other personages who are obstacles in the broad path of passion.

Mrs. Brandreth turns Madame Finemouche's creation inside out, as it were, and then determines to play the part in an entirely original manner. She in no wise denies the genius of the lovely Parisienne, but she will give the world of London her own conception of the character ; and those who have seen the piece in Paris, and who might naturally expect a faithful copy of the author's original interpreter, shall discover her power to achieve new and grander effects than the Frenchwoman, *avec tout son Latin*, has been able to produce.

Mrs. Brandreth goes back to London with *L'Ange Déchu* in her pocket, and the right to produce a literal translation of the same bought and paid for. She gives the play to Marcus Willoughby, a clever young dramatist who has written successfully for the Frivolity a season or two ago, and who enjoys the

advantage of being dramatic critic on three or four journals of more or less importance.

"Well, my dear Mrs. Brandreth," he begins, when he calls upon the manageress next day in Kensington Gore, "I have read your piece, and—"

"You like it?" inquires Myra.

"I think it extraordinarily powerful, startling, daring. The French are so much in advance of us in that line. Yes, it's a fine piece, no doubt; but it will want no end of alteration before you can think of producing it at the Frivolity. In fact, so much alteration, there are such inherent difficulties, that I scarcely see my way to adapting it."

"I don't want it adapted," answers Myra coolly. "I thought I told you that I wanted a translation. I have had enough of adaptations—whitewashed inanities, with no more flavour in them than there is in peaches preserved in tins. All I ask from you is terse and epigrammatic dialogue, and rigorous condensation in the mawkish scenes where the good people are talking."

"My dear Mrs. Brandreth, it's impossible. Have you read the piece?"

"I have seen it exactly six times, and read it twice."

"And you absolutely mean to play it? You'll ruin the theatre—even if you can get the play licensed, which I doubt."

"I'll bring all London to the theatre. As for the Chamberlain—well, I fancy the immorality is too refined to appear in a hasty perusal. We must try and smuggle it through somehow."

"Why not make Angèle Villeroy's sister instead of his wife, and Lavignon a bachelor? There would be no harm then in their love scenes. We might make some clause in the father's will the obstacle to their marriage."

"A purely English style of construction, in which probability is sacrificed to propriety. In order to escape the charge of immorality, we make our plots more improbable than the wildest fairy tale. Now your French dramatist starts with a motive strong enough to overturn a family or an empire, and builds his dramatic edifice upon a substantial foundation. Translate this play faithfully, Mr. Willoughby, or leave it alone."

Mr. Willoughby obeys, glad to earn the wages of his labour. The play is a commission, and whether the Chamberlain licenses the piece or not, the translator must be paid. He does his best, doubtful as he feels about the issue, and works with an artistic pleasure in the manipulation of a really fine play.

By one of those accidents which make theatrical adventure the most hazardous of speculations, the piece passes the censorship unchallenged, and, after laborious and most conscientious rehearsal, Myra produces the *Fallen Angel*, more extravagantly, more exquisitely mounted than any play she has put upon her

stage before. She is very reckless in money matters this season, less anxious than of old to avoid debt. She gives Mr. Nosotti *carte-blanche* for the furnishing of the drawing-room scene, and the result is a salon Louis Seize, in virgin gold, against a background of apple-green satin. As for Mrs. Brandreth's dresses, they are miracles of art and costliness, and turn the heads of half the women in London. Peacock's feathers, point-lace, beetles' wings, mother-of-pearl, diamonds. She rings the changes on the whole gamut of finery. But in the last act, the scene in which she achieves her triumph, she stands before her breathless audience robed in white cashmere, statuesque, classic as Rachel in Racine's *Phedre*. The friendly newspapers praise the piece, but with caution; the critical journals—the *Censor* and *Scourge*, *Connoisseur* and *Microcosm*—set up a howl of denunciation, charging the virtuous British public to avoid the Frivolity as a pest-house infected with French poison. But Myra's acting has taken the town by storm before the *Censor* or the *Scourge* has come out with its condemnatory analysis of the piece. Everybody talks of her—everybody rushes to see her. That serpent-like grace, that poetic despair, that agonising death in the last scene—these things have thrilled to the heart of society, always ready for a sensation. The favourite question to start a dinner-table conversation—even before Patti or the Royal Academy—is, “Have you seen Mrs. Brandreth in the *Fallen Angel*?”

Once more in her life Myra Brandreth tastes the sweetness of artistic success. She drains the intoxicating cup greedily; and makes the most of her triumph: shows herself in the Park, wearing that last fashionable combination of feathers and flowers which is called the *Fallen Angel* bonnet, because Mrs. Brandreth has first exhibited this particular style of head-gear in the famous play. She drives a victoria elegant and airy enough for Queen Mab, and a new pair of horses for which she has given six hundred pounds—she, the prudent housewife, whose care hitherto has been to make the greatest show with the smallest outlay, and to save money for evil days to come. She gives more dinners than usual this season, and talks of taking a house in Park-lane.

So the season goes on. Everybody—except quite young persons—sees the *Fallen Angel*. The play will run till the end of the season, may run for any number of seasons, one would suppose, from the rush there is to see it just now. Places are to be booked three weeks or a month in advance. The theatre overflows nightly. There are morning performances. Mrs. Brandreth plays Angèle de Villeroy twice every Saturday—seven times a week in all, an exhausting labour.

The season is at its height, when one afternoon in the Park there is a rumour—no one knows who originated it—that Mrs.

Brandreth is ill, very ill, some sudden and dangerous attack, and that there will be no performance at the Frivolity this evening.

A few people who have taken places look blank, and wonder whether it is "play or pay," whether their payments will hold good for another night, or whether, the entry being "scratched," they will forfeit their money.

"What's the matter with her?" asks Lady Leo Hunter of little Mr. Spinx of the clubs. "Has she lost her voice, poor thing?"

"Worse than that, I'm afraid. A fellow I know was at the theatre last night, and told me just at the last, after she'd taken the poison, you know, she staggered to the lights, stared wildly round the house as if she was looking for some one, and then fell suddenly forward—a very awkward fall, knocking her head against the angle of a table. Young Brown says, if he hadn't seen her in the piece so often, he should have thought it was all in the part—that awful stare round the house, and the cropper against the table, and all—ultra-realistic, you know; but knowing her business in the poison scene by heart, he knew there must be something queer. She was called for, as usual, directly the curtain was down, and after the audience had amused themselves by making a row for ten minutes or so, the stage-manager came on, and regretted to inform them that Mrs. Brandreth had fainted after the fatigue of the performance, and was too indisposed to appear in answer to their gratifying summons."

"Then it was only a fainting fit, I suppose," says Lady Hunter.

"Queer kind of fainting fit, according to Charley Brown. He'd noticed all through that last act that she talked rather queerly—muddled her words somehow—jumbled the syllables together. He says he doesn't expect she'll act again until she's been to Malvern, or Ems, or Chiswick, or somewhere, and been patched up by the doctors. Cerebral excitement, Charley says, something queer in the upper story. He goes to her Sunday evenings, and knows a good deal about her. She has been more excitable lately than she used to be—Charley says it's a case of brandy or chloral."

Mr. Brown proves himself a shrewd observer. The Frivolity is closed that evening, and until the end of the week, on account of Mrs. Brandreth's serious indisposition, say the advertisements in the daily papers. Paragraphs appear in the newspapers to the effect that the accomplished actress has overtaken her strength, that the scabbard is out of repair, the sword having been a trifle too sharp for it. Tension of nerves, exalted temperament; the papers ring the changes on this theme, and announce that Sir William Gull has made this interesting case his especial care; but no paragraph states the precise nature of Mrs. Brandreth's malady.

Society talks a good deal and speculates widely. The favourite theory is that Mrs. Brandreth has gone clean out of her mind, and is languishing in a suburban establishment, under distinguished medical treatment. Society opines that Lord Earlswood's unkindness is the cause of this calamity; and waxing compassionate, pronounces that his lordship has behaved badly.

The house in Kensington Gore is shut up. The Frivolity reopens after less than a week's *relâche*. *Kismet* is revived, with Miss Belormond, desperately coached, in Mrs. Brandreth's part, and fails to attract large audiences. The evil genius of burlesques gets possession of the delightful little theatre; fast young men, and women in doubtful toilettes and dyed hair, frequent the stalls that were erst the resort of the best people in London. The newspapers lament Mrs. Brandreth's absence, and an occasional paragraph informs the public that a new comedy by an eminent hand is in progress, in which the accomplished actress will reappear.

Little by little, before the season is quite over, the truth leaks out. The awful word paralysis is whispered here and there; and society, after setting up its own idea of lunacy, gets to know somehow that Myra Brandreth is being drawn about the quiet avenues of Leamington in a Bath-chair, helpless, fretful, semi-idiotic. The over-worked mind has given way. A paralytic stroke has been followed by softening of the brain: and for Myra this world is henceforth a faint and shadowy picture, and one day followeth another without progress or difference. There is neither yesterday nor to-morrow in this death-in-life: time is an endless to-day.

Before the unfolding of the gummy chestnut buds in Kensington Gardens, Lord Earlswood reappears in the only world which his wearied soul finds tolerable. He has spent his winter in wanderings far and wide—has tried yachting in the Mediterranean, and has been all but capsized in a sudden squall—has hunted in the Campagna, and assisted at a Roman steeplechase—has spent February and March in a boat between Cairo and the cataracts—and has found all these various modes of getting rid of time and money equally insupportable.

On returning to London and civilisation he throws himself vehemently into coaching, and drives the finest team of roans ever seen in the Park with some skill and a countenance of unalterable gloom. He has a skewbald team, hideous beyond expression, and painfully suggestive of Astley's Amphitheatre and the cavalry of Hyder Ali or Timur the Tartar, but reputed the finest possible thing in skewbalds. These he drives on alternate days, with the faithful Shlooker on the box beside him, and a

friendly group of the worst men in London behind. No feminine form has ever been seen on Lord Earlswood's drag.

"I wouldn't have so much as a mare in my stable," says his lordship when rallied on that deliberate avoidance of the sex which has lately been a marked idiosyncrasy in this shining light of the Coaching Club. "I wouldn't have anything to remind me that there are women in the world—I hate them so."

In the indulgence of this idiosyncrasy Lord Earlswood withdraws himself wholly from general society—is never known to enter opera-house or theatre—begins his day at about five in the afternoon, when he dresses for parade in Hyde Park, and finishes his evening, at the last fashionable temple dedicated to the worship of blind-hookey or poker, just when the east brightens with pearl and rose, and the thrushes and blackbirds stir themselves in their nests and break forth into little gurgles and gushes of rejoicing. At this tender half-mysterious hour Lord Earlswood may be seen emerging from the fashionable temple, a little the worse for his worship of the goddess Fortune—pale, gloomy of brow, and with eyes that are glassy from the glare of the gas.

His friends and followers opine that Lord Earlswood is going, at a very decent pace, to the dogs; but as he is temperate in his habits still and has no low vices, it may reasonably be hoped that, despite his aversion from the sex, some really good woman may yet take him in hand, reform him, and make him happy. The mothers of Belgravia have an eye upon him, and at the least sign of repentance he will be welcomed back to the fold. And, O, will there not be rejoicing over the return of such an eligible sinner!

* * * * *

Placidly pass the days in Herman's new home among the hills. Nearly a year has gone since Editha first brought her husband to the cottage, which they have christened Crowsnest, and Herman has taken no advantage of the loop line which brings the rail to Lochwithian, and makes Shrewsbury and London so much the more accessible. He has often talked of running up to town, but he has not yet gone; and he wonders at himself not a little, and wonders still more at the various occupations afforded by rustic life. He has his library and his garden, both hobbies in a mild way. He has a couple of handsome hacks for Editha and himself, and a cast-iron pony for a basket carriage, and a good deal of horse-worship goes on every morning between nine and ten in the sweet clover-scented stable, where the decorative work in plaited straw is a sight to see. They ride, they drive baby in the pony carriage. They sketch a little occasionally, they go fern-hunting, botanise a little, and set up a wilderness on the outskirts of their orderly garden, to which they bring the woodland and

hillside flowers they find in their rambles. Herman gets to know the hills by heart, and takes them to his heart, as Editha has done. They have more friends than they can count; these honest warm Welsh hearts have opened very wide to receive Herman Westray.

The simple pleasures of his life leave him ample time for his work. He has those tranquil evening hours—between sundown and midnight—at which he has ever found his brain most active, his fancy brightest. He spends many a long summer day reading and musing over his books in the garden, and he contrives to read more in this last summer than in any year of his life since he gave his laborious hours to the Greek dramatists, philosophers, and historians at the University.

In this pure air, among these breezy hills, the baby grows and flourishes abundantly, an object of universal love, a blooming blue-eyed boy, bestowing affection as lavishly as he receives it, but loving mamma best of all, as he informs his friends candidly, in his imperfect utterance. He loves Jack the pony *very* much, and papa, and Swish the Scotch terrier, and grandpa, and Mr. Pezzerit (infantine for Petherick); but mamma is first and best, mamma is so good—everybody loves mamma best. And Editha presses the chubby flatterer to her heart, and blushes at his praise.

Herman does good work in that quiet room facing the hills—work that he knows and feels to be honestly done—not that old slap-dash colouring of his, with more of the palette-knife than the brush, and the canvas a little too obvious through the paint; work that he would believe in were it even a failure in its immediate effect upon the world. Happily his new book is not a failure. The *Censor* has its accustomed sneer. The *Microcosm* is doubtful, and compares Herman disparagingly with its half dozen pet authors—writers whose works enjoy a limited sale and the approval of high-class critics. The *Connoisseur* praises the book warmly, and the public are delighted with it. This last book is more popular than anything Herman has ever written, and Editha has the delight of knowing that she has helped her husband, instead of hindering him in his onward and upward career. Sweet are those autumn days in which Herman gives himself a holiday after the publication of his last story, and Editha and he go together to explore the wilder scenery of North Wales. The descendant of the Cimbri glows with patriotic pride as they stand beside the Swallow Falls, and Herman acknowledges that there is nothing in Switzerland finer than this Cambrian cataract. Still sweeter is it a little later in the evening, as they drive back to their hotel in the twilight, to hear him say with conviction, “Editha, this has been the happiest year in my life.”

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